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THE WATER-HOUND; or, THE YOUNG THOROUGHBRED.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT, THE BANK RUNNER," "BOB ROCKETT, THE BOY DODGER," "WILL WILDFIRE," "DARK PAUL," ETC., ETC.



"I DON'T OFTEN MISS," SAID FRANK, COOLLY, AS DOWN CAME THE HEAVY GAFF.

The Water-Hound;

OR,
The Young Thoroughbred.

A Tale of Vengeance.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "JOLLY JIM," "THE TWO BLOODS,"
"DICK DASHAWAY," "YOUNG SLEUTH,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAIR UNKNOWN.

It was a cool October night. High above the roofs and spires of Baltimore rode the full moon, now plunging into a bank of clouds, now sailing through the sable sky, while light and shade chased each other through the lanes and streets of the monumental city.

It was late at night and few people were abroad. But in one portion of the city there was no scarcity of wide-awake persons, and no lack of light to replace the flitting moonlight. This locality was neither fairly inside nor out-of-doors. It had the grass beds, the gravel walks, and the green bushes of a garden. But it was covered with a broad canvas canopy, stretched to keep out the cool night air, beneath which flashed the blaze of a hundred brilliant lights.

On one side of the inclosure a brass band sent music thrilling through the air. Near by, on a broad platform, a company of merry dancers whirled in the mazy waltz. Elsewhere laughing groups promenaded the garden walks, or were seated at tables, smoking, chatting, or sipping at goblets of white crested beer.

It was a place of fashionable resort, which we may know here as Guy's Gardens, a highly respectable place of entertainment despite its beer and cigars, for it was noted as furnishing the best music in the city.

Seated at one of these tables were two young men, one a handsome, well-built, athletic person, tastily dressed, and with a face full of life and energy. His companion was a more burly individual, with the full face of one who is bound to enjoy life, no matter what follows.

These gentlemen were Frank Frazer and Bart Wilson, "two bloods" whom we have met before, in a very different situation.*

"Confoundedly bad cigars!" cried Frank, pettishly. "And I'm saddled with a whole box of them. Hang me, if I won't change my dealer. And I wish you'd tell me somebody I can give away the balance of my box to."

"Give it to me," answered Bart. "I will make a martyr of myself to help you out."

"You old villain!" laughed Frank. "No matter; you are welcome to the vile weeds."

"You don't know what a cigar is, Frank," replied Bart. "Why, they have a perfume like sandal-wood, and a flavor like—like—"

"Extract of rhubarb," supplied Frank.

"All right, my sweet youth. If you choose to throw away boxes of prime Havanas, I'm your market. Come, let's stroll down and see these fools in the corner kick up their heels. There's no harm in saying that, is there? Or maybe you are wanting to dig into the dance with the rest of them?"

"Faith, if I can get hold of a pretty partner, I won't mind," rejoined Frank. "The fun of a waltz lies in the face of the girl you dance with."

"It lies in her heels," growled Bart.

"Hold your tongue, you used-up sinner!" cried Frank. "You know no more about dancing than you do about cigars."

The music struck up in a wild waltz tune as they strolled onward toward the dancing-platform. It was one of those airs that are vital with vim and melody and that make the very blood dance in the veins. Frank's young feet broke in on an involuntary waltz to the strains of the inspiring music.

When they reached the platform it was crowded with dancers, who whirled in wild rings to the pulses of the tune, while flushed faces and laughing eyes shone in the light of the gleaming lamps.

The two young men failed to notice that they were closely followed by a third figure. It was a tall and graceful girl, her face hidden behind a thin veil. There was something eager in her aspect, as if she had a special reason for wishing to overhear the conversation of the gentlemen. When they stopped, near the stand, their

pursuer rested in the shadow of a bush close by.

"By the saints, Bart, can you stand that unmoved?" asked Frank. "That's an air to make a hermit dance. I'm going to have a round, if there's a partner left in the gardens."

"Go ahead young giddy blood," retorted Bart, with a sarcastic grin. "I like to see the young folks enjoy themselves."

"You!—you patriarch of twenty-five!"

"I've been through all that ages ago," and Bart fingered his beard with an air of great dignity. "But I suppose you've got to go through it, and get weaned. Dive in, if you can find the girl."

"I fear there's nothing left but the crooked sticks," answered Frank, looking with a doubtful air about him. "I must hunt up the manager and get an introduction."

"Too late! Too late!" sung, in a low, sweet tone, a soft voice near him.

The young man quickly turned. He saw before him, in the half-light, a graceful, swaying figure, the face hidden behind a light veil.

A quick light shot into his eyes. It looked like the germ of an adventure.

"Never too late to those of daring heart," he sung in reply.

"Light heels are worthier now than loving hearts," came the laughing song of the unknown, as she tripped lightly away.

Frank eagerly followed. She was not going to escape him so easily.

"Will you not dance with me, fair lady?" he asked, in earnest tones.

"Flatterer! How know you I am fair?"

"By intuition. I will know it by sight when you lift that envious vail."

"No, no," came the laughing answer. "You must trust to intuition. You shall not see my face. And yet I will dance one round with the redoubtable Frank Frazer, of Shenandoah fame."

"You know me, then?" cried Frank, with a start of surprise.

"Better than you are likely to know me," was the gay reply. "Come, the music is throbbing its soul out on the air. Time is flying. Why do you tarry?"

Mystified, yet deeply interested in the strange unknown, Frank said no more, though he was determined not to part with her without a glimpse at that veiled face. In a minute more they were upon the dancing platform and whirling through the mazes of the waltz.

Frank was a light and skillful dancer, yet he soon found that his partner was still more skilled than he. Round and round they went, keeping time with the pulses of the music, her graceful, swaying form yielding to every impulse as a light reed yields to the breath of the wind. Frank's arm lightly encircled her waist, her hand rested on his shoulder. He could feel her warm breath as they responded to the throbbing tune with a grace and ardor that drew more than one pair of eyes upon them.

In vain he sought to see her face. The blinding vail still hid what he felt must be its charming features. He could catch the dimmed gleam of a pair of bright eyes, and the red crimson lips, but otherwise only the faintest outlines of the face were visible.

"Cruel fair one," he whispered. "Why will you treat me with such disdain? Raise that envious vail, I pray you. I would give the world to see the charming face beneath it."

"You might be scared by its ugliness," she laughed. "I will not drive my handsome partner away."

"I will risk all such danger," he replied.

"No, no; The time may come. But not now. You must not know my face and name."

"And why not? Why, then, did you lure me on to dance?"

"Mayhap because we were both pining for a partner," she gayly laughed. "Stop talking, sir. You made a misstep there."

The dancing-floor was now thickly crowded. It was necessary, indeed, to be on the alert to escape collision with more awkward dancers. The rich strains of the music, the timed fall of busy feet, the sounds of laughter and gay voices and the gleam of gas lights through the shadowing trees, lent an enchanting charm to the scene. The young man drew his yielding partner to his side, with a warm impulse that was almost love. There was an influence emanating from her that affected him despite himself.

At this moment some startling words were whispered in his ear, in low, strange tones:

"Beware!" came the warning words. "Your life is in peril! Trust no one. Your life will be attempted this very night!"

With a quick start he looked hastily around,

and then at the face of his partner. He could see none near enough to have whispered. Was it she who had spoken?

"What do you mean?" he asked impulsively.

"Why do you give me this warning?"

She looked at him with a show of surprise.

"What warning?—But attend to the dance, sir. The air is drawing to its end. Let us not lose a note of this delicious music!"

Yet Frank did not dance as well as before. He could not help dwelling upon the strange words he had heard. His life in peril? By whom and how?

The music stopped, with a crash of brazen sound. The throng of dancers suddenly paused, while a cloud of dust enveloped them. Frank's veiled partner released herself from his arms, with a gesture of despite.

"I thought you could waltz," she said, "but you have stumbled through all the last measures of the dance."

"It is hard to think and dance at once," he replied, indifferently, looking inquiringly around him, with a vague hope of seeing the person who had addressed him.

"Go not home by your usual route! Avoid Fremont Avenue! There lurks the avenger of blood!"

The same startling whisper had spoken these words in his ear. With an exclamation that was almost an oath, Frank wheeled sharply around. There were a dozen persons near him, but none who seemed to take any note of his existence.

"It was you!" he averred, turning sharply back to his partner.

But his voice dropped into an accent of surprise. She was gone! She had vanished as a shadow might vanish. Look as keenly as he might through the throng, no trace of her was to be seen. There came a momentary impulse to pursue, but he repressed it instantly.

"No, no," he said to himself. "Let the bird fly. I will trap her yet. I feel that I have not seen my last of her.—But this strange warning! What am I to make of that?"

He forced his way slowly through the mass toward the point at which he had left his friend.

While the dance went on Bart had solaced himself with a cigar. He leaned his shoulder against a post and looked cynically on at the dance.

"Confounded ninnies!" he muttered. "That's what they call pleasure. Kicking up their heels and raising a dust! It's lucky there's some men born with good sense, or the whole world might grow mad. There go Frank and his girl, twirling like tops. I suppose next he will be falling in love with her. That's the second step of craziness."

He continued to smoke and growl.

"It's ridiculous good music, though. I'll say that for it."

In a few minutes afterward the music stopped, and the dancers began to spread from the platform through the garden. Bart puffed the white smoke through his lips, and waited patiently for his friend.

While doing so he became suddenly aware of some one close behind him, while a low voice sounded in his ear:

"Beware the vendetta! Guard well your friend! Be alert, for the bloodhounds are on his track!"

Bart flung away his cigar as if it had burned him, and hastily turned toward the speaker. To his surprise, there was no one in sight. At a distance he caught the twirl of a dress through the bushes, but in an instant it was gone.

"Deuce take it!" he muttered, savagely. "I'd sooner have a pin stuck in me at once. To creep up behind a fellow and whisper such stuff in his ear! Frank, and the vendetta! What does it mean?"

There was certainly something mysterious in these warnings, as they both agreed after Frank had come up, and they had talked it over together. They left the garden, eagerly debating the subject.

"What can they mean by the vendetta and the blood-avenger?" asked Frank, in a puzzled tone. "I have hurt no one, and did not know I had an enemy in the world."

"Have you forgotten Shenandoah Valley and the old cashier?" reminded Bart. "We did not kill him, but ran him to earth, and the old fox went down. He was well connected, you know, with a proud Maryland family."

"You don't think that?" cried Frank, a trifle startled. "The Manleys, eh? They are a bold and reckless crew, I know. Have they taken a spite against us on account of the old man's death?"

"It looks like it," answered Bart.

"Then we've got to be wide awake. But let them look out. They won't find Frank Frazer quite a baby."

"I hope they will keep clear from me," rejoined Bart. "A quiet life is my hobby, but I'll be hanged if I can get a whiff of it. There's always some deviltry afoot that I get dragged into. But let the Manly boys look out. There's such a thing as waking up a catamount."

A grim look came on Bart's face, as he set his teeth firmly together.

They continued to converse as they walked on, until they had reached a considerable distance.

"Where are we?" asked Frank.

"In Fremont Avenue!" exclaimed Bart—drifting to the very spot we were warned against. Shall we strike for a side street?"

"No. I vote to face the music." Frank looked stern and dangerous. "If there is anything in it, I want to find it out."

"Then you're likely to; and mighty soon!" ejaculated Bart, as he gripped his friend and pressed him suddenly and strongly toward the ground.

It was just in time, for at the same instant there came the sharp crack of a pistol-shot, and Frank's hat was torn violently from his head. The stoop had saved his life.

In a moment the young man was erect again, his blood fully up. He glared keenly across the shadowy street. Just opposite them was the mouth of a narrow lane, within which his quick eyes caught sight of a form in full flight.

"Quick!" he cried fiercely. "Your pistol, Bart!"

"I have none with me."

"Nor I; by foul luck! To your legs, then! We will run the fox down!"

He darted forward like a deer, sharply followed by Bart.

CHAPTER II.

A THRUST FROM BEHIND.

A WEEK or two after the period of the events recorded in our last chapter a large party of men had collected at a point some miles outside the city limits. Nor was the gathering lacking in the fair faces and bright attire of ladies. It was, in short, the race-course, and some fine trotters were booked for that morning's races.

Many carriages were wending their way to the inclosure, and within the ring a number of booths had been set up, some for the sale of refreshments, while around others betting was going vigorously on.

The people present, anxious for excitement in any shape, crowded eagerly around these centers, and the waving of arms and hats, and loud tones of excited voices, lent double animation to the scene.

Not far away from one of these betting centers stood our two friends, Frank Frazer and Bart Wilson. The former was reading, with a puzzled countenance, a letter which he had apparently just received.

"This thing is getting confoundedly monotonous, Bart," he exclaimed, with a vexed gesture. "I had this paper just thrust into my hand by some unknown person. Read it."

Bart did so, with knitted brows.

"More warnings. More danger," he ejaculated. "The vendetta again. And we are to beware the races. Signed, 'The Fair unknown.' What won't we have to beware next? Why, I'd sooner sell my head for a spring cabbage, and be done with it, at once."

"There's many a slip, twixt cup and lip," quoted Frank. "They missed the first shot. If they try the second they won't find me without a weapon. And you know that when I put my finger on the trigger some bird has got to fall."

"That's so," acknowledged Bart. "You can shoot like a scout, I'll give in to that. But I wish we had run the hound down that night we chased him."

"He had his retreat laid out," rejoined Frank. "You know how he disappeared. Slipped into some door, no doubt, and left us to scour the empty street. We've got nothing but that half letter, with half a name on it, which he dropped as he ran. If we could only match it with the other half."

He drew from his pocket half a letter sheet, which had been torn diagonally across the middle. A few broken lines of writing were upon it.

"Just enough to have all the meaning taken out of it," remarked Bart. "It's worth keep-

ing, though. That half name 'Mar'—must be Martin. We must try and nail the Martin that wrote it."

"And mar his game—I wish I could get my eyes on that girl again. For a fig it was she that slipped this into my hand. I am growing ridiculously interested in her."

"Smitten. I knew how it would be. Perhaps that's her whole game."

"No. The bullet that she predicted came to time. We must look out for its mate to-day. Your eyes were quick enough to save me that night. Just give me the same chance again, and I bet high I'll wing our flying bird."

"Bet high on what?" came a voice at his elbow. "I'll match it whatever it is. I'm backing Laporte for the best trotter on the ground, and I'll book your bet, if you've got a favorite."

"Hello, Harry, old boy! Is it you?" ejaculated Frank, as he recognized an acquaintance. "On the bet as usual, eh?"

"Two to one on Laporte against the field! Come, name your choice!" and the would-be better stood with book and pencil in hand, eager to record the wager.

"I'm not a better," answered Frank. "But if you are so anxious I won't mind matching you. I'll back Beauty against Laporte on an even wager. I don't want your odds."

"All right, my unsophisticated cove. I'm your man for even bets. What shall it be? A thousand?"

"As you please," answered Frank, indifferently.

"Deuce take you, Frank," whispered Bart angrily in his ear. "Why don't you fling your fortune in the Chesapeake, and be done with it? You will be a beggar in a month, at this rate."

"Maybe not," answered Frank, with a knowing look. "Harry thinks he has found a cheap victim. But I am not quite so green as he takes me for. Wait till the race is run."

The betting had drawn a knot of curious individuals around our friends. But at this moment a new sensation attracted their attention. The word had been given, and a group of horses broke from the start, and thundered at a rapid trot down the track. There were eyes now only for the race. No minor incident was likely to attract attention.

Frank's and Bart's eyes were fixed with like interest upon the track. Yet they were not destined to see the horses come in at the close. For at this instant there came behind them a slight thud, and a cry of keen alarm in a woman's tones. Simultaneously Frank felt a sharp pain in his back.

He quickly turned. Close behind him stood a vailed woman, whom he recognized at a glance as his strange partner in the dance. He could see no one else who showed any suspicious signs. There was only the group who had formerly stood there, with their eyes now turned inquiringly toward this new point of alarm.

Yet Frank was not the man to hesitate in coming to a decision. He caught the woman by the wrist, crying out:

"So, it's you again! You won't escape me so easily this time. By all that's good, I'm bound to see what sort of a bird it is that's flying about me."

"Release me, sir!" she cried indignantly.

"Not until I see your face," he sternly rejoined.

"Oh, release me!" she pleaded, in a tone of distress. "It was not I that did it. I sought to save your life. Let me go. I pray you!"

Some of the hard-fisted fellows who stood near hustled up at this piteous appeal.

"Let go the woman!" cried one angrily. "Let her go, I say, or by—"

"Drop all that," interrupted Bart, in stern tones, as he pushed the fellow back. "We can settle our business without your help. Do you see this?" He stopped and picked up a long bladed knife, whose extremity, for half an inch, was reddened with blood. "By the Lord, there's murder afoot! Are you hurt, Frank?"

"I don't know. Got a pinch, I fear."

"By Heavens, the man has been stabbed!" exclaimed a bystander. "See, his coat is slit, and the blood running!"

At this instant a loud shout distracted the attention of most of those present. The horses had just come thundering in to the close of the race. Excited cries and tossing of hats attested the deep interest of the crowd. This, and the knowledge that he had been wounded, caused Frank momentarily to loosen his grasp upon the wrist of the shrinking woman. With a hasty twist she broke loose from him, and in a moment more had disappeared in the thick mass of people. Frank started forward, but his pursuit

was hindered by the swaying crowd, while his cry of alarm was lost in the shouts of the excited sportsmen.

"By Jupiter, Bart, she has slipped me again!" he angrily ejaculated.

"Hold hard!" exclaimed Bart. "Let the woman go. Stand there, till I see if you are badly hurt."

"Poh! it is only a scratch."

"I'm not so sure of that."

Bart hastened to tear off his friend's coat and vest. The knife-slit was visible in the shirt, which was wet with blood. Hastily lengthening the slit, he laid bare the flesh of the left shoulder, on which the knife-thrust had been made.

A gaping but narrow wound was revealed, from which the blood was yet freely flowing.

"No artery cut, by good luck!" exclaimed Bart. "The knife hasn't gone deep. Does it lame you, Frank?"

"No. It's only a pin-thrust."

"Hang me if I'd like to be stuck with pins like that!"

The attention of the throng was now eagerly diverted toward the wounded man, and a dozen comments on the incident hastily proposed.

"It is a high-handed outrage!" exclaimed one. "It was the woman did it. No man would have been spiteful and reckless enough to stab in the midst of a crowd."

"What made her sound the alarm, then?" asked another.

"She had nothing to do with it," cried a third. "I saw the arm that struck. The woman caught it, and broke the blow. The man would have been killed but for her."

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated Bart, fiercely. "Why did you not seize him, then? Where is he?"

"I was off yonder when it happened," explained the other. "I hurried up; but he slipped into the crowd."

"What sort of a chap was he?" came eager questions in a dozen voices.

"I saw the arm, I tell you, not the man. It was a large, white hand, with a diamond on one finger. The sleeve was a gray-checked stuff. I gave the alarm, but I was tied fast in the crowd."

"It's rascally mysterious," remarked Bart. "But this bleeding must be stopped. Is there a doctor on the ground?"

"Come this way," suggested one of the bystanders. "Old Joe, up here at Parole's stable, is your man. He is dead sure on horses; and I've always found that what's good for a horse is good for a man. He's always got plenty of plasters and liniments."

"Lead on, then," exclaimed Frank, impatiently. "I'd have given something handsome, if you had nailed the chap that stabbed me. But my turn will come. Wait till I get a bee-line on that individual.—Lead on!"

Old Joe was a weather-beaten, leather-faced old chap, one-eyed, but with knowledges enough in the other to serve for both. He might have been through the storms of a century, to judge by his looks. He rose from the horse-bucket on which he had been seated, as the crowd approached, while half a dozen at once demanded his services.

"Saddle and spurs!" ejaculated the cross-grained old chap. "What's bu'sted here-away? Any o' the bosses took with the staggers? Don't say it's Parole, or I'll bu'st yer b'ilers!"

"It's a man, not a horse," was the reply. "Stabbed, old fellow. We want you to do up the hurt."

"Only a man?" growled old Joe, in a tone of cynical disdain. "Why, I thought it couldn't be less nor a fust-chop racer, by the row ye're makin'. Trot him out. Let's see the critter."

Frank was led forward to the cynical surgeon, to whom the life of a noted trotter was worth that of a dozen men, and who had lived so long among racers that he fancied himself more horse than man.

He looked at the wound with eyes of bleared wisdom.

"Mought be a sore cut if it's deep enough," he announced. "Tain't the best spot in the world."

"It isn't deep," explained Bart. "Here is the knife."

Old Joe looked at it questioningly, and then coolly inserted the point into the wound, without heed to the pain he might give the patient.

"Not much over a half-inch," he declared. "That's just a trifle. We'll settle it in a jiffy."

He evidently had imbibed some respect for Frank, from the firmness with which the latter

had borne the probing of the wound. It was not long before the gaping cut was treated with liniment, and its edges drawn together with plaster.

"There, don't disturb that, an' if you've got good blood you kin be choppin' wood in a week. I couldn't do no more if it was Parole hisself as had been hurt."

"Why, you confounded old jockey!" exclaimed Frank, as he resumed his coat and vest, "are you putting me below the level of a horse?"

"I hope ye're as honest, and as wide-awake, and as sure footed as some hosses I could name. Ye seem to be a sound, well-groomed, stiddy-nerved chap, and p'raps ye're up to the general run of hosses. But I don't match Parole with no two-legged critter as ever walked."

Frank laughed heartily as he turned away from the cynical old surgeon.

"All right, my good friend," he remarked. "If you cure my shoulder you can compare me with a donkey, for all I care. But I fear you would not find me to run well in harness."

"Get out, the whole o' ye, now!" exclaimed old Joe, surlily. "There's the 2:20 race up, and I calculate to take a squint at that myself. Don't patronize no slow hosses."

The crowd which had been attracted by these incidents speedily dispersed. The big race of the day was about to be run, and their interest in smaller matters rapidly subsided as the time for the race approached.

"How does your shoulder feel?" asked Bart, as the two friends walked toward the track.

"A little stiff.—I'm sorry I touched that woman, Bart. Who can she be, anyhow?"

"Some sort of a guardian angel of yours, I fancy.—Ha! there's the word 'Go.' The horses are off. Stir up here, Frank. You've been green enough to lay a thousand against a born sport. You can have the satisfaction of seeing your margin wiped out."

"Don't build on that. I know the horses. Hush, there they go, at the half-mile."

There were four horses in the race. Down the long, back stretch they came at a killing pace, and nearly side by side. Every breath was held, and every voice stilled, as two of them, a pair of grays, slowly drew ahead of the others, a bay and a black. When they turned the three-quarter pole the grays were a full length ahead, while the bay lagged still further behind the black.

"Laporte and Parole have it, nip and tug," cried an enthusiastic sportsman. "Beauty and Dart are out of the race."

"Do you hear that?" asked Bart.

"There's no race won till it's run," Frank coolly answered. "I'll lay you a hundred more that Beauty wins."

"Done!" cried Bart eagerly. "It will be a cheap hundred."

But he did not feel so sure as the horses came nearer, down the home stretch. The two leading horses were being pushed to their utmost pace, while the black was trotting with a far easier step.

On they came, with a thunder of hoofs and wheels. Parole was a head and neck in the lead, and caps were off and voices ready to shout in victory. But those who were further down the line saw the jockey who drove Beauty at this moment loosen the reins, while a chirruping sound came from his lips.

Instantly the glossy black darted forward with new speed. Ere the lookers-on could scarce tell what had happened Beauty had lapped the leading horses. A few seconds more and they were head to head. The rival jockeys, alarmed by this change in affairs, sought to shake out a trace more of speed, but in vain. The gallant black kept up her grand pace, till her shapely head and glossy mane showed in advance. The next instant the whole race came thundering past the judge's stand, Beauty the winner by head and shoulders.

Clapping of hands, tossing of hats, shouts of "Beauty! Beauty!" followed, until it seemed as if the whole field had gone mad. The swaying mass was wild with excitement. They could scarcely believe that this little-known horse had out-trotted the two veterans of the field, and snatched victory out of the face of defeat.

"Hang it! I'm a hundred dollars out after all!" exclaimed Bart, with a wry face. "But there's one satisfaction."

"What's that?"

"Only that you've warped that sharp sport, Harry Hilton. You're a lucky dog, Frank."

"I've seen Beauty trot before," Frank quietly answered.

CHAPTER III.

SPORT IN VIEW.

"It is getting to be a confoundedly ridiculous piece of business," remarked Frank Frazer, with a comical grimace. "There's fun in any reasonable kind of sport, but nobody likes to be set up as a target for ball and knife practice. If I could get my eye on the fellow once, I fancy the law would be saved trouble."

"Don't kick against the law, Mr. Frazer. That will never do. The law has an awkward fashion of kicking back."

The man who spoke was at all, well-developed person, his beardless face displaying hard features and keen eye. His stout figure was clothed in a loose suit of gray cloth. The room was an office-like apartment, with desks and revolving chairs, and a display of portly account-books.

In short, Frank's companion was a well-known member of the Baltimore detective force, by name William West.

"Trust to the law: it's got a long hand and a tight grip," he continued. "Just suppose you let me have that story again. It looks promising."

Frank repeated the description of the two attempts upon his life.

"If the hound would only show himself face to face, I wouldn't bother with the law," he reiterated. "But his striking in the dark is none too comfortable. What do you think of it, Mr. West?"

"It's a little bit mysterious," acknowledged the officer, shaking his head. "Somehow I don't believe it is the Manlys. You tell me there is no Martin among them!"

"No; I know no one of that name."

"Mar—, you see, is the address of the letter. It probably is the name of the man who fired the shot. But the queer part of the business is that woman. She wants to save you from danger, but at the same time to cover the villains. I have a notion that the vendetta and blood-avenger talk is all a blind."

"Ha! Then you think I am on the wrong track?"

"Not sure—mind you. We must follow up every clew. A large white hand, with a diamond—that's a good item. There's no evidence in this knife, though; it might have belonged to five hundred persons. The woman is the best figure in our game. Keep a sharp eye open for her; it might be worth something to you to see her face."

"I could not be rough with her," answered Frank. "I owe her my life."

"Very good; but she may not be on hand at the next attempt. Desperate villains like these are not going to let themselves be foiled by a woman."

"By heaven! there's something about the woman—I cannot tell what; but she has half made a fool of me."

"It's the old romantic story," answered the detective with a scornful laugh. "You're but a boy yet; take my advice: don't go falling in love with faces you have never seen—drop all such romantic stuff. You've got to have your wits about you if you want to checkmate this enemy. I will work it up for all that is in it; but I may need your help. Track that woman if you see her again—we may run our fox to cover."

"Very well," returned Frank, as he rose and took his hat. "But I'll give you first a week's free play for your work; I am going duck-shooting down the bay for a week. You may hit some clew before I return."

"Ah!" said Mr. West, with a reflective look. "But your shoulder—is it fit for such sport?"

"Yes. Old Joe's liniment has worked like a charm."

The officer sat in a moment's silent thought, as if revolving some project.

"See here, Mr. Frazer," he suddenly said, looking briskly up. "You're a quick, wide-awake fellow, and fond of adventure. If you want a bit of better sport than duck-shooting I think I can promise it to you. We have some lively work afoot, in which we are rather short-handed. If you want to see some life, say the word."

"I'm your man for sport in any shape," cried Frank, striking his hand into the open palm of the officer. "And if there's a speck of danger in it, so much the better. Of course it's a straight business!"

"I represent the law," answered Mr. West, somewhat pompously.

"Open your budget then. Let's see what you have in it."

"We are fitting out a naval expedition against the oyster pirates," rejoined the detective.

tive. "They are in force down the bay, and playing the deuce with the beds. The planters are calling on the law for be p."

"There's nothing in that. They'll scatter like a flash of sparrows at sight of a police-boat," said Frank contemptuously.

"Not they! I tell you they are in force; and they threaten to fight. It is our game to capture as many as we can; and they might fight hard before they are taken. We cannot stop many officers, and need some good volunteers."

"I am your man, then," answered Frank. "And I can answer for my friend. Who else have you?"

"About a dozen prime fellows. There will be plenty of good grub aboard. It is going to be a jolly trip. I can book you, then, for the cruise?"

"When will you sail?"

"Next Wednesday."

"All right. That will give us time for a p p at the canvas-backs. We are going to shoot off Somers Point, and you can pick us up on your way down. I haven't ruffled a feather this year, and must have two or three days' shooting."

"Are you a good shot?"

"Tolerable," answered Frank, indifferently. "Don't miss more than two out of three on an average. Good-day, Mr. West. If my unseen foe don't wing me first, I will report at Somers Point next Wednesday."

"And meantime I will work up the case," rejoined the detective.

Frank left the room with his free stride, the officer following him with his eyes.

"There's good stuff in that young blood," he soliloquized. "He shall not go under if I can hinder it. But there's something mighty mysterious about this business."

In another part of the city, at a time not very distant from the period of this conversation, another was taking place which bore strongly upon the same subject.

The scene of this second conversation was a richly-furnished apartment in a large mansion situated in the fashionable quarter of the city. The room was furnished in crimson velvet, and with a profusion of objects of art that betokened wealth.

Two persons were present. One of these was a handsome but dissolute-looking young man. He was powerfully built, and bore an appearance of great muscular strength. His expression seemed high-spirited and resolute, though there was an occasional furtive look in his eye indicative of treachery.

The other was a richly-dressed young lady. She had a clean cut face of great beauty. Its expression just now was that of pride and disdain—yet those hazel eyes could soften and those red lips wear a less scornful curve. It was one of those faces that can change as the tide changes, and grow now earnest as the sun, now tender as the moon. Evidently, from its present expression, harsh words had passed between the two.

"You dare not and you shall not try it again!" she passionately exclaimed. "I have screened you so far, but if you try me too much—"

"You will turn traitor, eh?" he sneered. "I am much obliged, Mabel. You have been kind enough to show your hand. One would think none of the old blood ran in your veins, by your weak-heartedness."

"I scorn the old blood when it leads to murder!" she hotly rejoined.

"Murder? I don't call it by so harsh a name. Revenge is a sweeter word. Girl, by the Lord, you shall not stand in my path! You would betray me! I see your purpose in your eye!"

He sprung up as he spoke and caught her wrist, while he glared threateningly into her face.

"If I had wanted to betray you it would have been done ere now," she calmly rejoined, releasing her arm from his grip. "Sit down, sir. You cannot control me by violence. I do not fear you. And I repeat that I will cease to screen you if this goes on. The man you would slay has never injured you."

"He has injured mine; and I and mine are one."

"But I am not one with any such revengeful scheme."

"I know you, girl! You have water in your veins, where you should have fire. You have let this fellow's pretty face fool you. Do you fancy that I have not had my eyes on you? But you had best beware! If you seek to betray me I will kill you as I would a fly. I have set them all adrift now, by that letter I was shrewd enough to drop. They can hunt Mart Hanley

if they will. But I fancy the nearer they get to him the further they will be from me."

"You will kill me, you say?" There was not a quiver in her voice. "I believe you are devil enough to do it. But our family do not die easily. Remember that. You shall not harm this youth, I tell you. If you do I will give you up to the law. And I care not for your threats."

"Very well, Mabel," he rejoined, with an easy smile, as he lazily rose. "I have just learned that Frank Frazer is going down the Chesapeake for a week's duck-shooting. He could not play better into my hands. And I hardly think you will be there as a marplot."

"I will put him on his guard!" she passionately cried. "You shall not harm him!"

"Do not be in too great haste about it," he scornfully answered. "I will give you fair time to think."

As he spoke he slipped through the doorway, and the click of the key sounded harshly in the lock as he secured the door behind him.

"You can have opportunity to reflect," he mockingly cried through the door. "I will leave old Pomp for your attendant. Suppose you amuse yourself by telling your story to him."

The trapped woman ran hastily to the door and violently shook it. It was too firm to yield to her strength.

"Good God!" she cried, in horror. "He will kill his foe! And it will be my fault! Why did I not tell him his enemy's name? Why should I screen this merciless fiend?"

She fell back on a chair, her hands to her face, her whole soul filled with horror.

CHAPTER IV.

POINT SHOOTING FOR CANVAS BACKS.

It is a wild scene which now opens out before us. A low, flat stretch of grassy meadows, a broad reach of water, a line of reeds and marsh grass between land and water, telling of swamp and treacherous mud. The shore is a wavy line, the water now cutting deep indentations into the land, the land now protruding in swells, or in long points into the water. And all lay still and deathlike under the rays of a low autumn sun.

But far out on the water appears that which attracts the excited attention of many persons, who lurk at various points along the coast. Dark objects moving rapidly in lines and groups through the air. Birds, no doubt, but it takes a practiced eye to tell at that distance that they are the renowned canvas-backs of the Chesapeake—the prince of ducks.

Hundreds of sportsmen are scattered at various points along the shore. Some lie in grass-covered boats, sunk until their gunwales are on a line with the water, while groups of decoy ducks float around. Others are on shore, concealed amid grasses and reeds, or behind wooden screens, some with "toling" dogs to coax the birds to shore.

The bird is a shy and wary one, and is not to be trapped without the exercise of great cunning on the part of the sportsman. It is never without its sentinels, whether sleeping by night or feeding by day, and usually can only be shot from ambush.

There is, however, another mode of shooting it, the most difficult of all, and this method is being adopted by the sportsman who stands erect on the extremity of a long narrow point of land, in full view of the flying birds.

This method is by a direct, perpendicular shot at single flying birds, high in the air. It needs a keen eye, a lightning touch on the trigger, a dead shot. Yet it is the plan chosen by Frank Frazer, for it is he who stands on the point. The feeding birds, disturbed by the gunners, in their flight to new feeding grounds, usually fly over, instead of circling around these points of land. They fly high, however, and cannot be brought down except by a first-class shot.

Frank had been stationed here for a couple of hours, crouching to partly conceal himself, and rising to fire when the ducks came overhead. But the shrewd birds seemed to fight shy of the "point," and he had not yet a feather to show for his pains.

"What luck!" exclaimed Bart, coming off to him. "I'm tired of my fun. Pegged away a half-dozen times from my blind, and haven't a feather to show for it."

"You're not going to give it up already! You will let the hang of aiming after awhile. It needs experience."

"I've got a little more experience than I want," growled Bart. "After my last shot."

"How was that?" asked Frank, smelling a joke.

"Why, the confounded bird just lifted its head with a knowing air, gave me a sly wink, and then went on feeding as if it thought the safest place it could find was in front of my gun. That settled my business. I shouldered arms and came away in disgust."

Frank laughed heartily at his friend's experience.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Bart, a little miffed; "I don't see as you've done any better, and you a brag shot."

"They're shyer of me than of you; that's the trouble," returned Frank. "Hist! Here comes a bunch. Stoop! They're bound this way. I fancy I'll get a crack at them."

There were about a dozen birds in the bunch which Frank had sighted. They flew straight for the point, rising as they did so, until they were more than two hundred feet in height.

"No go," whispered Bart. "They're beyond reach."

"Not much. I can reach them at three hundred feet with this piece. Ware! Here they come!"

The birds flew straight onward, spread out in a wedge-shaped double line. When they were nearly overhead Frank rose with a quick movement, his fowling-piece at his shoulder. The aim was almost perpendicular, and was quick as lightning. A touch on the trigger, a keen blaze from the mouth of the gun, a sharp report, and the old bird that formed the point of the wedge suddenly checked its flight, fluttered an instant in the air, and then came tumbling straight downward, stone dead.

Another report from the second barrel. Another bird broke from the flock and came down at a sharp angle, struggling and fluttering. It struck the clear water ten feet out from the edge of the point.

"Two, by Jupiter! That's prime work!" exclaimed Bart, springing up excitedly. "Hang me, if I didn't always say you were the primest shot going. But how are we going to get that bird? If we only had a dog."

"The best dog going would be of little use for a wounded canvas-back," replied Frank, as he proceeded to reload. "The cunning things will swim under water till they fool the sharpest dog. There's a punt here in the reeds, but there's no use trying it."

"Yes there is," rejoined Bart. "The bird caught it heavy. See! he's kicking up his heels. All the trick is taken out of that chap, and I'm going for him."

Jumping into the concealed boat, he pushed it out with an oar, and quickly reached the bird, which was feebly flapping in the water. With a sharp twist to its neck, he flung it into the boat, calling out gayly:

"Can't afford to lose any when we've only two to show for two hours' work. My, ain't it a beauty!"

He looked admiringly at the bird, with its glossy back crossed with wavy lines, and its black and white breast. Taking the oars, he rowed ashore. Frank had reloaded, and was waiting for another chance.

"Down in the boat!" he warned Bart. "Here comes a single chap, but I've a fancy he's going over the point."

The bird came on, flying low. It was not a hundred yards high when Frank rose and fired. But whether from over-eagerness in the marksman, or other cause, the shot failed. The bird flew on untouched. A vexed exclamation came from Frank's lips. The duck swerved slightly, but kept on. It passed overhead and was off at a long angle.

Wheeling as he stood, fowling-piece to eye, Frank followed the flying game for a moment, and again pressed the trigger. A clean, sharp report. The bird suddenly halted; poised motionless for an instant in the air; and then tumbled headlong downward, striking the water heavily thirty yards from shore.

"That chap won't crawl away, anyhow," he exclaimed. "Go for him, Bart. It isn't often I waste two shots on one bird."

"You're too confoundedly greedy," grumbled Bart in reply. "I'd be well satisfied to get one bird in twenty shots. But when a knave of a bird winks at me, and goes on feeding, as if it thought I was only firing a salute, it's confoundedly discouraging."

Frank laughed as he reloaded, while Bart rowed out for the game.

It seemed, indeed, as if Bart's coming had turned the luck in Frank's favor. During the rest of the afternoon the birds seemed to have taken a fancy to fly over that point, and crack after crack of Frank's piece added rapidly to

the gathering heap of slain birds. He was certainly a prime marksman, for he hardly wasted a charge of shot during the afternoon.

"Don't believe there's your match at a snapshot on the Chesapeake," cried Bart approvingly. "See here, Frank, you've had your share of sport. I'm going to show you what I can do. Here comes a neat bunch of birds. Let me have them."

"All right," answered Frank. "I hope you'll fetch your bird. Don't waste time in aiming. Slip your eye along the barrel, and let fly. It's the only way."

"Ay! ay!" returned Bart, bringing the gun to his shoulder, while he fixed his eye on the coming birds. On they flew, not seeing, or not heeding, the crouching forms on the point of land. They were yet a hundred yards off, and were rising to pass the point at an elevation, when Bart hastily rose, glanced along the sights, and pulled trigger. To his utter amazement and Frank's surprise, a bird dropped from the flock, and tumbled heavily downward.

"Good! Prime! The other barrel! Let them have it again!" he exclaimed.

Bart turned and hastily fired, but whether he was aiming at Baltimore or New Orleans he could not himself have told. Certainly it was not at the birds, who flew on unhurt.

"Dash me, if you ain't coming out!" cried Frank, as he picked up the bird, which had fallen almost at their feet. "Try it again, my boy. You'll make your bag yet."

"Not a bit of it," returned Bart. "I'm not fool enough to spoil my reputation. I've got something to brag of for the rest of my life, and I'm not going to give anybody the opening to prove it was a chance shot."

Frank laughed at his friend's wise caution.

"How came you to pick out the tail bird of the flock?" he asked. "You should have aimed for the leader."

"Somehow I have a notion for tail birds," answered Bart coolly.

He did not feel it necessary to explain that he had aimed at the head and hit the tail of the line. There are cases in which a wise silence is the pink of wisdom.

A half hour more, and the sun lay low on the western horizon. Collecting their game, which amounted to a dozen of fat birds, with Bart's bird for tally, the two friends shouldered their fowling-pieces and left the point, well satisfied with the day's sport.

As they walked along, some distance back from the shore-line, they passed at intervals a half dozen-sportsmen, intent on the exciting game of duck-shooting.

Some lay in their low sunk, and grass hidden boats, surrounded with decoys, with a comrade in a light boat hidden among the reeds, to pick up such birds as might fall. Others were on shore, screened from the feeding birds. One fellow they passed, with a toling dog, whose operations they curiously stopped to watch.

The practice of "toling" is a curious one, which it may be of interest to describe. In this mode of duck-shooting the sportsman is hid behind a shore-blind, and has with him a mongrel water-dog, which has been taught to run back and forth along the shore, after sticks and stones thrown from side to side. The ducks are very curious, and on seeing this strange behavior of the dog, from their feeding-grounds several hundred yards off-shore, will swim in to learn what it means. The dog continues to run, and the birds swim further and further in until within a few feet. Often they will stand on the beach, staring in stupid wonder at the dog's antics.

This is the time for the sportsman to let fly, when, at the sound of the guns, the dog immediately springs into the water, to arrest the flight of the wounded birds.

It is one of the kinds of sport that the true sportsman looks on as utterly spurious, a mere form of murder.

Shaking his head Frank resumed his course, followed by Bart.

"That's not the way we bring down our birds," remarked the latter.

"No," laughed Frank. "You and I don't indulge in such amateur work as that."

It was near sundown when they reached their destination, a lonely sportsman's inn on the Maryland bay shore, standing far apart from any other habitation.

CHAPTER V.

GUNNING FOR BIG GAME.

If the inn was low and narrow, and its appointments few and meager, there was one point in which it could vie with the most stylish of metropolitan hotels. Its table was hard to

match. It was a rough-looking body of men who sat down to the supper table, but they had before them a meal fit for a king. This was the rich and delicate meat of the canvas-back duck, the delight of epicures, served up piping hot, and looking juicily tender as it steamed in its wide platter. There were other dishes of red-head and bald-pate ducks, only surpassed by the canvas-back. These flanked by side dishes of huge Chesapeake oysters, raw and fried, and by plates of steaming hot biscuit, made up an epicurean table in which persons much less hungry than the tired sportsmen might have taken delight.

Great were the trencher feats done, sharp the clatter of knives and forks, and many the compliments paid to "mine host" for his success in getting up a sportsman's supper.

But there was little conversation until the edge of appetite had been dulled, and the satisfied gourmands lay back easily in their chairs to inspect the ruin they had wrought.

"Maybe the grub can be beat," said Bart, picking some last morsels, "but I have never had the luck to be about when it was beat."

"There's nary a two-winged bird in the sky as kin hold a candle to a geniwine canvas-back," positively asserted a weather-beaten old fellow, at the foot of the table.

"You can have your own way about that," answered Bart, easily. "I won't dispute you."

This was the key-note to a busy conversation, in which ducks as food and ducks as game bore a principal share. The old chap who had just spoken showed himself as good at talking as he had been at eating, and monopolized a principal share of the conversation.

"You gentlemen think you're havin' good shootin' now," he asserted, "but bless you, you dunno what duck-shootin' means. Ye ought to been here ten years or more agone, afore there was a gun fur every bird. It's jist amazing how we used to drap the birds. I've bagged a clean 200 in one day, little as I look, an' I don't brag on my shootin', neither. Why, bless you, in them days we thought nothin' on a hundred head fur a day's sport."

"For a day's murder, you mean," growled one of the sportsmen. "You mowed them down with your swivels, and called that sport."

"Nary time! I'm talkin' of shootin' from the shoulder. There is sich things as duck pirates, more's the pity, but they all oughter be sunk with stones around their necks, to chaw wild celery theirelves, so long's they won't give the birds a chance."

"Are there many other birds here except the canvas-backs?" asked a stranger.

"Lord love you, yes, plenty. Why, there's a good half-dozen sorts of ducks, and some of them prime eating, too. There's the Mallard, the Butterball, and the Blackhead, besides the sorts we've had for supper, and it ain't unkin-mon for us to git a blaze at a cronking Canada goose. Then there's the bay snipe, which makes go d sport on the flats. And now and then we start a clump of plover. They don't fall easy, though. They're a confounded hard bird to shoot, and I'd advise you city folks to stick to duck, if you want to make a bag. Ye'll not git many plover fur a day's sport."

"Are there not swan, occasionally? I'm told that they frequent the Chesapeake," asked another.

"If you want to settle your minds on that p'int, jist file out to the kitchen door, and if you don't see a geniwine swan hanging there by his hind legs, then you kin blame the cat. I drapped him to-day from a reed-blind," said the old man proudly.

"You did?" asked the last speaker, with much interest. "I've heard of swan on the Chesapeake, but thought it was all a traveler's story."

"Not much. They travel mo-t as thick as the geese in some seasons. Why, it was only last year, when I was ambushing fur canvas-backs, what should I see but sixteen long-necked swans feedin' not sixty yards away, and as innercent of danger as a cat on a fence. You bet I blazed away at their heads, which is the only safe part, and I dropped the second barrel on them as they riz."

"How many did you bag?" asked the interested listener.

"I s'pose you wouldn't b'lieve me if I said there were ten of them; so mebbe I'd best keep quiet," and the old fellow leaned back in his chair with easy dignity.

"Why, you old rogue, you only killed two!" cried a sportsman near him.

"Well, s'pose I did. I didn't say as I killed any. Guess a man o' my age is got a right to draw a parallel, hain't he, without havin' a lot of arithmetic plugged down his throat?"

The old chap got up, and walked away with offended majesty.

A laugh followed, and the conversation grew more general, many stories of sporting adventure going the rounds of the table.

At this juncture a couple of strangers came in. One a tall, square-built, gentlemanly person, with a handsome face, adorned with a long mustache. He bore a fowling-piece, which he deposited in a corner. His companion was one of the shore sportsmen, a tanned-face fellow, who had been evidently acting as aid to the city gentleman.

The stranger looked easily around the circle of guests, a slight change coming upon his expression as his eyes fell on the form of Frank Frazer, at the head of the table.

"Looks as if that table had been struck by a simoon," he remarked, with a smile. "Come, landlord, have you got nothing fresh for a hungry man?"

"Calculate I kin skeer you up a bite," answered the landlord, as he left the room.

Most of the others had now left the table. Our two friends, Frank Frazer and Bart Wilson rose and strolled from the room, followed by the stranger, with an odd look as they did so.

Frank struck a match and lit himself a cigar. "Who is that man?" he asked of Bart.

"Hang me if I know." "I thought there was something familiar in the face, that's all. Strikes me he has the Manley nose."

"It has something of the same twist."

"I hope, if he is of that breed, he'll confine his attention to the ducks. Between you and me, Bart, the birds are better than the cigars down this way. This is a wretched affair," he took the weed from his lips with an air of disgust. "Any letters?" he asked of the bartender.

"There are two for you, Mr. Frazer, jist come in," was the reply, as a brace of epistles was handed over.

Frank took a seat aside, and opened the first of his epistles.

"This is from Will West, the officer," he said. "The police boat will be down, and stop for me off Somers Point on Thursday. This is Tuesday. That gives us another day's popping at the birds, Bart. You can try your luck again on the wing."

"Not if the court knows herself," answered Bart. "I am not fool enough to discount my luck."

Frank laughed, as he opened his second epistle. But his face soon grew serious, while a puzzled look came upon it.

"What's the matter?" asked Bart. "Has the bottom tumbled out of stocks? You look as grave as a tombstone."

"Read that." He tossed over the open letter, and resumed his cigar.

Bart ran his eyes hastily over it, while a harsh exclamation broke from his lips.

"Shoot me fur a jackass if this isn't getting monotonous!" he ejaculated. "The vendetta again, eh? You're to be followed to this out-of-the-way hotel. Your life's in danger here. Signed by 'The Fair Unknown.' Blast it all, you'll have to keep your eyes open, my boy. We've got proof that there's no humbug in that girl's warning."

Frank sent a cloud of smoke curling upward to the ceiling.

"What do you think of the chap who just came in?" he asked. "It struck me that he gave me a queer look."

"Yet he seems an open-faced sort of coon. Guess he's only after a snap at the birds."

"At any rate I'll be on the lookout. Forewarned is forearmed."

He pocketed his epistles, and continued to smoke, conversing lightly on general subjects as if the warning had already passed from his mind.

The evening and night passed away without further incident of importance. Frank had not been without dread of a night attack from his unknown foe, and had carefully fastened his room door. But there seemed no occasion for precaution. No evidence of any wrong intention displayed itself.

The morning rose very favorable to sport. The sun was coming up brightly over the eastern horizon. There was a fresh wind, and a high ripple on the water. It was just the day to keep the birds in motion, and to deceive them by the rocking of the decoys.

"Will you take a boat to-day?" asked Bart of his companion.

"Not I. I prefer point shooting."

"All right. I'll try my yesterday's blind. I want to get my eye again on that duck that

winked at me yesterday. I've got a grudge against that chap which I'm bound to have out."

The day went on with varied luck. Frank had a good bag of birds by noon, and even Bart had one to show, which he vowed was the very one against which he had a spite.

The afternoon sport began with an increased number of duckers, though the birds fought shy, and hopes of game seemed poor.

The late-comer of the night before strolled down to the shore, and stationed himself behind a blind not far away from the point from which Frank was shooting. There was not a ghost of a chance for ducks there, but he obstinately chose that station, despite the remonstrances of his guide, and sent off the latter on some errand.

Frank continued to shoot, oblivious of the fact of this near companionship. Bart was, or was supposed to be, a half-mile further down the bay shore, in company with a toler.

A half-hour passed with little show of birds. Frank continued to crouch on the point. Finally a clever bunch of birds came from the west, heading toward the point. He fixed his keen eye upon them, and steadily waited. They came nearer and nearer. They were evidently going to cross the point.

They were almost overhead before Frank rose. Aiming perpendicularly, he let them slightly pass his station ere he pulled trigger. A bird paused suddenly in its flight, and came fluttering down. He pulled the trigger of the second barrel, but as he did so the gun was thrown sidewise, and its charge went wild.

Simultaneously there came to his ears the sounds of two shots, and then a loud yell, and a chorus of cursing. Frank looked hastily around. On the shore, at no great distance from him, a man was dancing wildly, and giving vent to a storm of curses.

He recognized him at a glance. It was the stranger of the previous night. At the same moment he caught sight of Bart, who was resting upon the smoking muzzle of his piece, looking with an odd smile at the stranger.

Frank run quickly inward; but before he reached the shore the stranger had turned upon Bart, with a bitter oath, and fiercely exclaimed:

"Confound you for an awkward jackanapes! Do you know you've put a charge of shot into me?"

"Only stung you a bit, I fancy," said Bart, coolly. "Was too fur off fer a shot to go deep in a thick skin."

"And what the bound did you mean? Hang me, if I don't match you!" and he began fiercely to reload.

"Thought I saw a duck off in that direction—that was all."

"So I'm your duck, am I?"

"Looks that way," answered Bart, with provoking coolness. "I'd advise you to go to a doctor and have them shot picked out. I've a notion we both aimed in the wrong direction. You might have brought down my friend here for a duck, if I hadn't fired a trifle the soonest."

Frank had by this time come up, and was gazing curiously from one to the other of the two men.

"It was a ball struck my rifle. You don't generally shoot canvas-back with ball-cartridge?" he asked grimly.

"I was aiming at the birds," replied the stranger testily; "but this fool fired into me and disturbed my aim."

"Or you might have dropped a bird too heavy for your game-bag!" returned Bart, in stern tones. "Now I've just got one bit of advice for you, my cove—I've got another load yet in my second barrel; if you don't streak out quicker than lightning, shoot me if I don't pit it into you!"

The stranger attempted some reply, but Bart raised his gun so threateningly that the other turned and made a hasty retreat, thinking perhaps that prudence was the better part of valor.

"I've been watching that chap all day," explained Bart—"I knew I'd nail him in some trick before the day was over."

CHAPTER VI.

MIDNIGHT MOVEMENTS.

A WHITE WINGED yacht had just put in to a wharf that stretched out from the bay shore. A dilapidated wharf it was, looking as if it might have served to moor Noah's ark after the flood, and never been mended with a new log since. Yet it was a favorite halting-place for steamboats carrying sportsmen to the gunning-grounds, and it had just served to land a passenger from the yacht in question.

The light boat veered and stood out again into the bay, while the single passenger walked up toward the main land.

Yet this person looked like anything but a sportsman. He was a very small and very young man, though of a trim and neatly-dressed figure. His cap was of navy-blue, and bore a red band of officer-like aspect. In face he was of an olive complexion, but very handsome, while a long, silken mustache and a tastefully-cut beard gave tone to his attractive features.

Frank and Bart, walking up from their shooting stand with their load of game, looked with interest upon this striking stranger as they met him. A polite nod passed between them, while the stranger fixed his liquid eyes upon their faces with great interest.

He stopped hesitatingly as they passed, and seemed disposed to address them. Frank turned back.

"Excuse me," he remarked, in a tone of unusual softness. "I am looking for the 'Duckers' Rest.' Is it near here?"

Frank cast a keen glance at him before replying. There was something familiar in the tone, though he could not imagine where he had heard it before.

"We are going there," he replied. "If you choose to accompany us we will be happy to show you the way."

"With pleasure," answered the youth. "You have had good sport," he continued, looking with interest at their load of game.

"Tolerable," answered Frank, indifferently. "It hasn't been a good flying day for ducks."

The young man laughed. He had a singularly sweet laugh.

"Mercy; if I'd brought down a feather for every duck you have, I'd been proud of my skill."

"That's what I tell him," answered Bart, glumly. "But these brag shots are never satisfied short of a cart-load. He came near being made game of himself. Lucky I didn't have to fetch him home in a wheelbarrow."

"How was that?" asked the stranger, quickly, while a peculiar look passed over his handsome face.

"A galoot took him for a duck, that's all. Would have peppered him, too, only I happened to pull trigger a trifle sooner, and saluted the chap with some duck shot."

An expression that seemed like fear, and almost terror, came upon the face of the youth.

"Did he intend it?" he asked, eagerly. "Or was it an accident?"

"It looked blazingly like a solid purpose," answered Bart, grimly.

The young man asked no further questions, but fell into a deep silence as he accompanied them to the inn. He took no part in the conversation between the two sportsmen, but seemed lost in some gloomy meditation.

"This is the place," said Frank, at length, as they gained the front of the low-roofed inn.

"Thank you," exclaimed the stranger, with undue warmth. "I am greatly obliged."

"Oh, not at all! We have not gone out of our way."

They entered the hotel, the stranger quickly disappearing from the view of the clump of sportsmen who thronged the bar-room.

Frank and Bart deposited their game and weapons and then looked at each other meaningly.

"What do you make of it, my boy?" asked the former.

"Don't make it at all," answered Bart, shortly. "There's something confounded odd about that chap. Looks like a swan in a flock of ugly ducks. And he's slipped away as if he didn't want to be seen."

"I ought to know him. There's something about the young fellow— Eh? Oh, yes, we had fair sport to-day." This was in answer to a question.

"You've made a neat bag, that's sure," answered the person who had addressed him. "By the way, who is your young friend? A fine-looking chap that."

"Never saw him before," answered Frank. "Picked him up on the marsh and towed him in."

The stranger, indeed, seemed disinclined to show himself. Supper passed without his presence, and he failed to make his appearance during the evening. Nor was there any sign of the sport who had received the charge of Bart's gun.

"Guess we can account for that loot, though," remarked Bart. "Likely he's off to a surgeon to have the lead picked out. Bet you high he won't sit comfortable for a week."

"What's become of the young chap who came

in with us this evening?" asked Frank of the landlord.

"Dunno. Took supper in his room. Likely he's there now. Sort of a high and mighty feller that. Looks like a navy cadet from Annapolis. Is he?"

"Don't ask me. He's a stranger to me."

"I just judged by his airs," answered Boniface. "Them young sprouts feel their oats so mightily. It's a wonder the United States is wide enough to hold some o' them."

Night came down deep and dark. It was late October, and there was a chill breath in the air, that made a fire feel highly comfortable. The sportsmen huddled over the great stove in the bar-room, while many a yarn of remarkable duck-shooting went the rounds.

Bed-time came at length, however, and silence fell upon the lonely hotel, as slumber enwrapped the senses of all its inmates. Frank Frazer was too sleepy to take the precautions of the previous night. His door was left on the latch, and his only thought of caution was to place a revolver under his pillow. The man of whom he was in doubt had not returned to the hotel, and he saw no need of any unusual wariness.

Outside it was a chill and gloomy night. Occasionally the moon broke through the dense veil of clouds that shrouded the sky, but for most of the night a thick darkness prevailed. The lit lantern that swung in front of the hotel was the only beacon light through the gloom.

Yet all was not at rest within the building. A slender, shadowy form crept stealthily along its passages. The thing, whatever it was, felt its way with excessive care, now pausing and listening intently, now stealing on without a sound.

A door opened with a slight creak at the touch of the phantom hand. It was the door of Frank Frazer's room. Yet, whatever the object of this strange intruder, there was no sign of an intention to enter the room. The figure paused, listening for a moment, and then made a flinging motion with its hand. A patter sound followed, as if something light had fallen on the floor.

It then turned and retreated with the same stealthy tread. Some distance down the passage another door stood open, which it entered.

There was a low-burning light within the room, whose gleam revealed the slender form and silken mustache of the stranger youth. Then the closing-door hid him from view. Who he was, and what his purpose in this midnight prowling, did not appear.

Everything about the Ducker's Rest sunk again into rest and silence, while sleep appeared to have locked all its inmates within its silken bonds.

Yet outside all was not at rest. A person was approaching the hotel, guided by its swinging light, and taking advantage of the occasional glimpses of the moon. On coming near enough to be within view of any wakeful person about the building, he moved more warily. Skirting around the building, he brought himself under cover of a small stable, which permitted him to approach out of view from any window of the hotel.

Ten minutes afterward he was under the walls of the building, and had erected a light ladder, which just reached the sill of a window on the second floor of the edifice.

He now crouched warily, as if waiting to discover if his movements had given the alarm. All continued deathly still. He began to ascend the ladder.

His movements were made with such extreme caution that a fly would scarce have been disturbed by them. In a few minutes the window was reached. With the same care he lifted the sash, and then waited to see if the inrush of cold air would disturb the inmate. It was Frank Frazer's room.

A minute more, and the prowler had noiselessly crossed the sill, and stood within the room. He looked warily around him. Deep darkness enveloped everything. The position of the bed could not be observed from where he stood.

But at this moment the moon broke dimly from a dense cloud, and threw a faint gleam of light into the room. It was sufficient to reveal two things. It showed the furniture of the apartment, and the bed, with its inmate apparently wrapped in deep slumber. And it gleamed on something bright in the hand of the midnight prowler, a glitter as of a drawn blade, while his face, faintly touched by the light, looked stern, dark and dangerous.

Murder was brooding over the sleeper, with nothing to warn him of its approach, no hand to check the deadly blow.

Now by a gliding, dragging movement the murderous wretch approached. Step by step with a pause between each. The bedside is reached. He broods over his victim, glaring down with a face of hellish intent. It seems as if nothing could save him now, from that gleaming blade which vibrates in the air above his breast.

The moonlight, striking on a mirror that hangs near the window, on the opposite side of the room, clearly displays the form of the undisturbed sleeper.

The murderer pauses a moment, lifts his knife higher, and takes a step back as if to give greater effect to his blow. The muscular arm descends. What shall save the victim now? It seems as if nothing but the hand of an angel can interpose between him and death.

And yet that strange chance, which has saved so many a life in the moment of imminent peril, was at that instant active in Frank Frazer's behalf.

For the backward step which the murderer had taken was followed by a loud, sharp report, so startling as to disconcert his aim. The knife, instead of piercing his victim's breast, simply grazed his side, and buried itself deep in the yielding bed.

The sleeping man was wakened by the same sharp detonation. Turning quickly over, he glanced upward, with all his senses actively alert. He took in the situation at a glance. That dark form, towering over the bed. The knife-hilt quivering by his side. The hasty effort of the would-be murderer to withdraw the knife and repeat the blow.

But the keen blade had penetrated the wood of the bed-slats, and refused to yield. Dropping it the villain sprung sharply for the window, at the same instant that Frank, with a fierce exclamation, reached beneath his pillow for the revolver he had placed there.

In an instant it was drawn and cocked. A quick glance revealed the form of the fugitive outlined against the opposite wall. The tables seemed turned now. Frank was dead sure at a snap shot, and he meant work. A touch to the trigger, a keen report, and the figure of the fugitive suddenly disappeared, while the crashing of glass resounded through the room.

"By the Lord! I've winged my bird," exclaimed Frank, leaping from bed, and rushing across the room, to where he expected to find a writhing form.

To his utter amazement there was no one there. He gazed for a moment around him in stupefied wonder. Was it a ghost at which he had fired? There was not even a shadow to be seen.

A quick thought, and he sprung to the window. There, just vanishing behind the barn, was a gliding form. Another pistol-shot rung through the house, but too late, the fugitive was under shelter.

But how had he escaped from the first shot? The fact was that Frank had really fired at a shadow, as he quickly perceived. The fugitive had been in the window, at the instant of the shot. But the outlines of his form, thrown by the moon into the mirror on the wall behind him, had been reflected from this mirror to the bed, and Frank's shot had been made at the reflection in the mirror, instead of at the actual fugitive. He had brought down the phantom, with the splintered glass.

By this time the whole house was in an uproar. The two pistol-shots in succession had roused every soul, and the slamming of doors and loud exclamations resounded throughout the inn.

A crowd of half-dressed men were soon rushing into Frank's room. He still stood by the window, pistol in hand.

"What is the matter? What are you firing at?" asked the landlord.

"At an escaping murderer."

"The deuce! A nightmare, I reckon."

"Maybe that knife is a nightmare," cried Frank, pointing sternly to the bed. "If so, it is the sort of dream that I don't like."

The landlord sprung forward. As he did so there came a sharp detonation from beneath his feet. Similar cracking sounds came from under the feet of others present.

One of these, who carried a lamp, stopped and examined the floor.

"By all that's good!" he cried, "it's covered with cracking matches! How came they here?"

"That's more than I can say," answered Frank, in surprise. "I didn't put them there. But whatever lucky hand scattered them has saved my life."

"I think so," answered the landlord, who

was tugging at the knife. "Hang me, but the fellow struck hard."

"Where is he?" cried Bart.

"Shot out across the meadow."

"Then let loose the dogs! We'll chase the hound down! It will be an unlucky night for him if he falls into my hands."

There was a quick rush from the room at this suggestion of a pursuit.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMING OF THE WHITE WING.

FORTUNATELY for the purpose of the murderer, the dogs had been confined in the house, and had failed to take alarm from his stealthy approach. And it appeared now as if they would be useless. They were hunting-dogs, but not accustomed to the pursuit of man. It seemed impossible to make them take the scent of the fugitive.

Frank and Bart, with several others, impatiently ran ahead, hoping to overtake the flying villain. The country was flat and open for miles, and a man's figure could have been seen for a long distance with any reasonable light. But the darkness cut off every object twenty paces ahead.

The moon was again under a cloud, and the pursuers rushed on blindly, spreading out as they ran, but with little hope of success.

Luckily the moon broke for an instant from its thick shroud, and in that moment Frank's sharp eyes caught sight of a moving figure, far off toward the water side.

He dashed forward with renewed hope, feeling for his pistol as he did so. The young man's blood was up, and it would go hard with the fugitive should he overtake him.

At the same moment the dogs gave voice. They at last had been made to understand what was expected of them, and had taken the trail of the flying villain.

But the few moments lost by the pursuers in dressing, and in loosing the dogs, had given the fugitive a good start. Frank ran hastily on. In less than ten minutes he had reached the shore of the bay at the point where the figure had appeared. But the treacherous moon had given no second glimpse of light, and the form had utterly vanished. Which direction he had taken along the shore it was impossible to tell.

While the pursuer stood irresolute a brace of dogs came down at full speed to the water's edge. There they stopped short and stood yelping, as if they had suddenly lost the trail.

A thought came to Frank's mind. He soothed the dogs and listened intently. From afar across the waters, through the stillness of the night, came the faint dip of oars. The mystery was cleared. The fugitive had taken to the water.

Frank stopped and sought to look out over the water. But the darkness shrouded all objects, though he had a vague fancy that he saw something moving far out. He fired his pistol in that direction, more to call up his friends than for any other purpose.

In a few minutes an eager crowd had gathered around him.

"Why did you fire? Is he in sight? Did you wing him?" came the excited queries.

"No. He has taken to the bay. Are there any boats handy? If we keep up the chase it must be by water."

"There is a boat just off here," cried one of the hotel men. A minute after there came a sharp exclamation from him. "By mighty, it's gone! The lock is smashed, and the fellow has taken it. H'ang his thieving picture, there's not another skiff within half a mile."

"Then we're dished, that's all," rejoined Frank. "The hound is safe away, and it is useless to pursue him further. If that confounded moon would break out, there might be some chance yet; but there is none in this darkness."

He turned on his heel and proceeded back toward the inn, whose swinging light could be seen like a star in the distance.

Several of the pursuers remained on the shore with the hope that the fugitive might put to land again. But it was a weak hope. Frank was joined by Bart.

"There's one thing I can't get through my wool," declared the latter. "How came those matches on the floor? You didn't scatter them there?"

"Not I. It is a puzzle to me also. There's been more going on this night than we have any idea of, my boy. It looks as if I had a friend as well as a foe."

"Three times threatened and three times saved," said Bart; "that ought to break the charm. But there's something confoundedly

mysterious about those matches. How came they there?"

"I give it up. There's no fair unknown at hand now."

"They seemed made for the purpose," resumed Bart. "They snapped at a touch."

There was little more sleep that night. The question was discussed and rediscussed around the great stove in the bar-room, with no approach to a solution of the mystery.

Bart told of the previous escapes of his friend and the mysterious warnings he had received, to the surprise and astonishment of all present.

"It looks like a set thing," remarked a veteran ducker. "It's nip and tug between your friend and foe, Mr. Frazer, and it's hard to tell which of them will have the last kick at the football."

"If I am not mistaken the football will take a hand in the game himself, before it's played much further," answered Frank, grimly. "I can't always expect to have a good angel at my elbow; but let me get a fair sight on this vendetta scoundrel, and I'll answer for his hide."

"I believe you, my dear sir," answered the sportsman heartily. "I've heard of your skill as a marksman.—Suppose you set out that black bottle and some glasses, landlord. The folks here look dry."

"I am going to bed to finish my sleep," remarked Frank. "I've got work before me tomorrow; and I don't fancy my slumber will be disturbed again. By the way, landlord, where is the young fellow who came last night? He hasn't slept through all this hubbub?"

"No. He was about, very anxious to know what was up. Gone to roost again."

"He's wise. I'm for roost too."

But most of those present had the roosting fever taken out of them, and sat chatting over the black bottle until daylight.

The morning broke bright and fine. The clouds which had proved so annoying during the night, dispersed before the rising sun, and left a clear sky. A fresh wind blew across the meadows, but it was the wind of October, at once soft and bracing. It seemed to blow all the shivering chill of the night out of the air.

A late breakfast prepared the sportsmen for the labors of the day.

"Going to try the point again, Mr. Frazer?" asked one of the gunners. "You have had good luck there."

"No. I'm off, with my load, to-day," answered Frank. "I may take a snap this morning, but there's a boating-party to stop for me to-day."

"Where's your navy youth, landlord?" asked Bart. "Is the lofty fellow breakfasting in his room? The little rascal ought to be keelhauled, to take some of the starch out of him."

"Lord love you, he's eaten and off an hour ago!" answered the host. "Walked over toward the bay, where there was a yacht standing off and on. Jack here saw it swoop in and take the fellow aboard."

"And what brought him here?"

"Mercy o' me knows. He may have heered of my biscuit and canvas-backs. That ought to be enough to bring a chap from Annapolis."

A laugh followed, and the conversation grew more general.

It was as the landlord had declared. The youth after an early breakfast, for which he seemed to have but a light appetite, had set out across the flats, in the rays of the just risen sun. Reaching the dilapidated wharf he gazed over the level reach of waters. Here, a half-mile out, lay the yacht from which he had landed on the previous day. It was standing off and on, as if waiting for its passenger.

A wave of his handkerchief in the air, and the light vessel quickly swung round, with squared sails, and darted in before the wind. A few minutes brought her close to the wharf, when, with a long sweep, she shot round, and came up with quivering sails. A rope flashed through the air, and she was fast moored.

"Ready to come off, Mr. Bradley?" asked a rasping voice from the deck.

"Yes. Lend me a hand."

Taking the outstretched hand of the brown-faced yacht captain, the youth skipped daintily on board. A hidden smile marked the face of the captain, as if he fancied his passenger effeminate.

"And whereaway now, sir?" he asked.

"Down the bay," came in a somewhat haughty tone. "Lay to, when you get an offing of a few miles, and keep a lookout for the sail I told you of. I will be on deck in an hour."

The youth walked aft and went below, while the yacht swung off and put out again into the bay.

"There's something rascally odd about that boy," growled the captain. "I don't know just what to make of him. Soft as silk, yet he knows what he's about. No matter; it's my business to obey orders. He's got something hidden in his poll."

Frank managed to steal another half-day's shooting, while waiting for the expected boat. But the birds flew poorly, and he got but a brace for his pains, with another brace of plover, at which he had got a snap.

Bart tried his hand too, and lugged in a white-winged goose, as proudly as if he had brought down an elephant.

"If any of you want quill pens, just call on me," he remarked. "I'm in that line now. You never saw such a neat drop as I made of that old gray goose."

They were at dinner when this conversation took place.

"There's a sort of schooner-yacht out yonder, signaling as if for a passenger," remarked the landlord, entering.

"For me, I fancy," answered Frank. "We'll have to bolt our dinner, and gather up our traps, Bart. Has it any colors flying?"

"Yes; a red and blue pennant."

"That's the boat. It's good-by, then. Hope you gentlemen will have fair sport. I'd liked to have had a few more days of it, but it isn't in the wind."

A return signal had brought the yacht ashore, and a couple of its inmates were on their way to the inn, when they were met by Frank and Bart carrying their shooting material. An attendant bore down a heavy load of ducks and Bart's gray goose.

"How d'ye do, gentlemen? Glad to see you, Mr. West." There was a warm shaking of hands. "I'd ask you to the inn to try a duck dinner, but I fancy we can manage that matter aboard."

He pointed to his load of game.

"Faith, yes; I fancy we'll luxuriate," was the reply. "You're paying your shot well, Mr. Frazer. But let's aboard. I hear the pirates are out in force, and we've no time to lose."

"A neat boat, that," said Bart, with an approving look.

"And sails like a flash," answered the officer. "There's not a yacht in Baltimore can beat her with any sort of a stiffish breeze. Her only weak point is when the wind's down. Let's aboard."

The White Wing, the name of the police boat, was a well-appointed craft, with a clean run that betokened speed. She dropped off from the wharf and swung gracefully up into the wind, shooting with a dipping motion down the bay, with the wind a-starboard.

"She moves like a swallow," said Frank, approvingly. "But where shall we store our traps, Mr. West? And what's to be done with these birds?"

"Come below. I'll find you a berth and a locker. As for the birds, there are some idle fellows here who will like nothing better than to strip them, with the chance of payment in a duck's wing. This way, gentlemen."

A half-hour afterward they passed close by a yacht lying-to a few miles below the point. The eyes of the cadet-like youth rested keenly on them as they passed. Yet they were suffered to make several miles down the bay ere the yacht was seen to drop off before the wind and put herself on the track of the White Wing.

It was near sundown when there was observed, from the deck of the police boat, another broad-sailed sloop that was hugging close to the eastern shore.

"I'd say that chap was a pirate only for his show of canvas," remarked Mr. West. "I wouldn't care to sail in such an egg-shell before a stiff breeze."

An hour after the night fell, hiding the three craft from each other.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OYSTER PIRATES AT WORK.

THE night had come and gone, and morning again broke over the rippled waters of Chesapeake Bay. The wind had continued to rise during the night, and was blowing freshly from the west, while shredded, stormy-looking clouds covered the sky with their ragged edges, driving in successive battalions across the sun's path.

Far down the bay, miles below the scene of our last chapter, a small fleet of boats were busily engaged on a broad shallow of the west bay.

A glance would have told any one accustomed to the business that they were oyster-boats, and were occupied now in the art of dredging. But it might not so readily have appeared that they

were poaching on forbidden ground, that, in fact, they were oyster pirates.

The water-farm upon which they were engaged was several miles in length by something over a half-mile wide. Backward and forward across this they sailed, dragging their iron dredges, which raked and swept the oyster-beds at the bottom. They were attached by ropes to the vessels, and as the latter moved before the wind the iron teeth of the dredges tore up the oysters from their beds and deposited them in the wire-meshed bag that followed the dredge. At intervals these were drawn from the bottom, with their loads of bivalves, and emptied into the open hold, to be again flung overboard for a fresh rake.

Thus the fleet had been busily engaged since daybreak, making all haste to load up ere they should be disturbed in their little game. For in fact they were working upon a field of cultivated oysters, and they could as honestly have taken the turnips from a land-farmer's field as the oysters from a water-farmer's plantation.

Yet the oystermen did not look on it in this light. They upheld that whatever grew in or under the water was every man's property, and that the laws forbidding them to poach were base and oppressive. They could not be made to see that they were doing wrong, and were ready to resist the execution of any such laws, if strong enough to do so with safety. They looked on themselves as honest and ill-treated citizens.

The fleet comprised a full dozen of vessels, sloop-rigged, but most of them good sailors, as they were built for flight as well as work.

One was particularly sharp-built, and carried a heavy show of sail. At its peak floated an odd-colored pennant, that perhaps might have had some use in signaling. The deck of this craft was patrolled by a specially rough-faced old salt, who looked as if his nose might have long done duty as a nutmeg-grater, while his little, half-closed eyes gave out an odd twinkle of humor and spirit.

He had a heavy jaw and firm-set mouth, a short, thick-set and powerful figure, and looked like the man for an emergency, as he vigorously strode back and forth on his deck. He was, in truth, the appointed leader of the fleet.

Old Dirk Hardscrabble, which was the name he carried, cast his twinkling eyes with a shrewd glance around the horizon, and then cried to the men, who were busily engaged in hauling up the dredge:

"Heave boy merrily, my lads. Rip the oysters like fun, fur I've a notion we'll soon have to up and streak, or stick and fight. There's the glint of a sail way off there to the north'ard as ain't to my liking."

The dredge came up over the vessel's side with a will, its bag of meshed wire drooping low with a heavy load of "bay fruit." Old Dirk's eyes twinkled.

"That's a good haul. Tumble 'em in. Tumble merrily and ahoy. Rip and rove, my loves, for our time's short. Hard down, helmsman. We're scrapin' the edge of the bed. About ship, and we'll take the back track."

Up into the wind came the Lively Emma, as Dirk called his craft. The broad sail shook and bellied as the wind filled it on the other tack. She shot rapidly onward. But in a few minutes the dredge was again flung overboard, and lowered to the bottom. Catching the rough surface of the bed, it brought the vessel up with a will, until she quivered and trembled in every timber.

Staggering onward at half speed before the fresh wind, the slender mast bent as if it would snap in two.

"She bites, my boys. She bites deep," cried old Dirk. "We're on a ripe bank, and will fill up like wax. But I don't like the glint of that sail."

Snatching a glass from its locker, he put it to his eye, and gazed long and earnestly to the north, shaking his grizzled head slowly from side to side.

"I've a shrewd notion it's the chap as chased us off moorings last spring," he remarked. "Ahoy, there, the Polly! look lively. Yonder's something with the mug of a policer, comin' down on us on a taut bowline. Hearty, my loves. We mought have to pull stakes and streak out."

This hail brought a lively stir to the deck of the other boat. In a moment more the pennant at the peak of the Lively Emma was hauled down, and a signal flag run up in its stead. A movement was quickly visible on all the vessels of the fleet. They had evidently taken the alarm.

"By the blue jahbers, lads, she's not alone!"

exclaimed the old salt. "Yonder's a brace of other sails. Off there to the right. We mought buff off one of 'em, but we're not in shape to fight a hull fleet. Anyhow, we'll take another scrape, and let 'em show their feathers."

The sail which his keen vision had distinguished far to the north was rasping down the bay hand over hand. It was yet six or seven miles distant, but, like a great white-winged bird, it came every minute more plainly into sight. To the east two other sails were visible; one well out in the bay, the other hugging the eastern shore, and somewhat in advance of its two consorts.

"They're glowing old sailors," remarked Dirk, a little anxiously. "Yacht-rigged, the whole set on 'em. Wonder if it's a sailin'-match? Anyhow, I'm good fur one thing—they won't gobble up the Lively Emma like a fat 'yster. Bet I open their eyes when I show 'em this here craft's heels."

Down came the yacht-like fleet. Fifteen minutes more and they were in plain view, not three miles away.

It was in fact the White Wing, and the two strange yachts, which were serving as unbidden consorts. On its deck stood Will West, the officer, with a sturdy-looking body of associates, and our two friends, Frank and Bart.

"They're a bold set of vagrants," remarked the officer. "They're dredging yet, as if they were going to play bluff. They're in force, too. We may have a scrimmage with the rascals."

"Will they fight?" asked Frank, leaning easily against the mainmast.

"Fight? You bet they will, if they get their blood up. Some of them are rough devils enough."

"Then suppose you set me ashore," said Bart, with a comical grimace. "If they're going to shoot oyster tougs, I'll be sure to have a quarter section taken off my arm. There's so much of me that they can't miss."

The officer laughed; he did not take much stock in Bart's cowardice. He looked off to the left, and shook his head.

"I don't know what to make of those two chaps. They hang to us like a pair of leeches. Can you make them out any better, Cap? You ought to know them, if they're Baltimoreans."

The weather-beaten tar who sailed the White Wing gave another look at their consorts.

"This chap astern I've seen afore," he remarked. "It's a yacht as I'm told belonged to Harry Prime, a Baltimore sport as you ought to know. Joe here says he hears it's been sold lately, but he dunno who's the buyer."

"And the other?"

"That's a dead stranger. If it's a Baltimorean, it's a new one. I never see'd it on these waters afore." He took a long squint at the yacht, which was creeping under the eastern shore. "If it'd only come into the open I mought make it out. Its p'ints are lost in the shadder. Guess, anyhow, they're nothin' as we're interested in. Only a pair of sporters out on a cruise."

The two broad sails of the White Wing, hauled taut, and bellied with the fresh west wind, caused her to career till her lee bulwarks dipped beneath the waters. And still the helmsman held her stanchly up. It seemed as if she would capsize with a thread more of breeze. The water gurgled and boiled under her forefoot, and ran off aft in a long, gleaming wake.

"She sails like a bird," cried Frank, approvingly.

"And she'll go over like a tub, if you don't let her head off," growled Bart. "If you folks want to drown, I don't."

"We're going into that pirate fleet, if we go bottom upward," cried the officer. "Ha! they've taken the alarm at last. There's something like a signal flying from the peak of that tall-masted sloop. Look at them. They're gathering like a flock of canvas-backs before a flight."

"I thought they had more fight in 'em," grumbled the captain, in a tone of disappointment.

"Maybe they don't like our show of force," remarked Mr. West, pointing to the two yachts. "Off they go, in a bunch. Now it's a question of the best sailor. Some of these chaps are regular flyers, but it's a caution if we don't pick up the laggards."

"There's none on 'em can hold a candle to the White Wing," exclaimed the captain, angrily.

"All right. Stick to that. But some of them distanced us last spring."

"They had the wind of us then. We've got our own breeze this morning."

It was an interesting scene which now appeared on the rough waters of the bay, which

was plowed into white-caps by the stiff breeze. The fleet of oystermen, huddled together like a flock of frightened birds were sailing due south, and hoisting every shred of canvas that would hold.

Behind them came the White Wing, careening in her flight. North of her again, and apparently losing ground in the race, appeared the small yacht, which was none other than that which had taken off the cadet like youth. Eastwardly the larger, sloop-rigged vessel, which had so long hugged the shore, had suddenly veered, and stood out on a long tack across the bay, her sails gleaming in the sun as she slipped out from the dark background of the tree-covered shore.

She stood across the bay in a southwest course under shortened sail, and hugging the wind very closely. This maneuver threw her back of the White Wing, whose stern she promised to closely graze.

"What is she up to now?" asked the officer.

"Afraid of a lee shore, mebbe," answered the captain. "She's been huggin' it a bit too close for comfort."

Frank moved from his station and walked down to the lee side of the careening vessel, curious to discover the secret which had so far shrouded this mysterious craft.

The movement proved an unlucky one, for at this moment a fresh puff of wind struck the sails, the vessel gave a quick surge, and ere he knew how or why, he had lost his footing and was swept helplessly over the deck.

He caught a dragging rope, but it was snatched from his hand, and the next instant he plunged over the side of the vessel, and into the boiling waters of the bay.

"Man overboard!" came the thrilling cry.

"Whereaway! By Jove, it's Mr. Frazer! Up with your helm. By Heaven we must pick him up if the devil takes the pirates! Lively, men. Stand by to launch a boat."

But the vessel had such headway that in a minute it had swept a hundred yards away. The tacking yacht meanwhile came up, in the very track in which Frank was struggling in the water. It was a dubious question whether either would be in time to save him from his perilous position.

CHAPTER IX.

A HOT ENGAGEMENT.

FRANK fortunately was a good swimmer, and easily kept himself afloat on the rough waters of the bay. He had the sense not to struggle, and kept himself at the surface by an easy paddling motion, knowing that help would soon come to him if he could hold out to wait for it.

The stranger yacht headed straight for him. It seemed to have taken the alarm from the White Wing, and came rushing on at an immense pace through the water, plowing up the waves with its sharp cutwater. It was close upon the swimmer ere the White Wing had succeeded in veering, and starting on her reverse course.

"Look alive," came a loud voice from the yacht. "Be ready to take a rope as we pass. We'll have you on board in a jiffy."

The boat came up like a huge bird, darting swiftly through the ruffl'd waters. It seemed for the moment as if it would run Frank down. But at the critical juncture it slightly yawed, bringing him on the lee quarter. At the same instant a coiled rope fell with a heavy splash into the water, directly in his path.

Frank, who had all his senses sharply on the alert, grasped it with vigorous energy, and in a moment was being dragged through the water in the wake of the flying craft.

"Now, hold hard!" came the cheering cry. "We'll have you aboard in a flash."

Willing hands at the rope soon drew him from his perilous position. For a moment he hung suspended in mid-air, and was then lifted over the low bulwarks, and onto the deck.

Shaking himself like a water spaniel in the warm sun, he looked curiously around on the crew of the yacht. To his surprise he saw a half-dozen stalwart negroes, black, powerful, hard-faced fellows. There was but one white man visible, but his face at once attracted Frank's earnest attention. It was the stranger of the "Ducker's Rest," the man who had received Bart's charge of duck-shot, and whom they had suspected of the murderous midnight assault.

He recognized Frank at the same instant, with a frowning look, followed by a smile that had in it more of threat than his frown.

"Mr. Frazer!" he cried, with a tone of recognition. "A lucky rescue. Come, you must go below at once and dry your wet clothes."

"There is no need," answered Frank, a little doubtfully. "I am obliged, but my own vessel will be here in a few minutes and take me off."

"There is need then," cried the other in a tone of authority. "Fetch the gentleman aft. Quick, before he gets chilled."

At this peremptory command two of the negroes caught Frank by the arms, and hurried him rapidly aft, with such energy that he was unable to resist.

"Into the after cabin. He can dry himself there by the fire."

Frank attempted to remonstrate, but in vain. He was hurried rapidly below, and into a small but well-warmed and luxuriously-appointed cabin. Here his conductors left him, and to his surprise and alarm he heard the key snap in the lock as they closed the door behind them. He was a prisoner!

Meanwhile the White Wing was coming rapidly up. The yacht fell off before the wind and approached her on the opposite course.

"Ahoy, the White Wing!" came in stentorian tones through a speaking-trumpet. "I have Mr. Frazer safe, and will look after him while you deal with the pirates. Put about or they will leave you in the lurch."

"What yacht is that?"

"The Comet, of Baltimore, Hanley commanding."

A moment's consultation appeared to take place on board the White Wing.

"Where is Mr. Frazer?" came a hail.

"Below, drying off. Will hand him over when you're done with those fly-aways."

"All right. Good by."

The spars of the White Wing creaked and groaned. She luffed sharply up into the teeth of the wind, took it on her starboard quarter, and was off again like a dolphin in the wake of the pirates. Her officers were apparently satisfied that the rescued man was in safe hands.

During these evolutions the fleet of oystermen had been making the best of their way in retreat. The White Wing had lost considerable time, and the fugitives were more than two miles away, flying before the strong breeze down the bay. A quarter-mile behind the pursuer came the Comet, shortening sail, as if with a desire to diminish her speed. A half-mile further back lay the other yacht, moving gracefully on in the same direction.

Such was the situation at the moment when the police-boat resumed the chase. Making all sail she drove onward at her greatest speed, while the Comet, with considerably reduced sail, lagged behind. The distance between them rapidly increased.

More than an hour thus passed. The sun was now well up in the sky, and was pouring its beams warmly on the broad, ruffled waters, dispelling the chill of the October air. This hour had made a marked change in the situation of affairs. The oyster fleet was stretched out over a line of more than a mile in length, while the White Wing was within half a mile of the slower sailors. Nearly two miles behind the Comet moved slowly onward.

"Our would-be consort doesn't seem to have much stomach for fight," remarked Mr. West. "See how she drags. By Jupiter, what is she up to now? She is putting about!"

"Afraid she'll be gobbled up with an oyster dredge, I reckon," answered Bart. "She wants to keep her distance."

"A rascally, cowardly Comet," cried the officer, shaking his head. "Hey, Cap! What are those chaps ahead up to now? They seem to be signaling again."

"The leaders are shortening sail. Mebbe they're goin' to wait for us."

"By Heaven, I think so! They fancy we've lost our consorts, and they can handle us single-handed."

"They're too much for our mettle," said the captain dubiously. "Guess we'd best peg out."

"Not much. We'll make a dash for those rear vessels. We can lay them aboard, and capture one or two before the others can interfere. Shake out a knot or two more, Cap. Can you shew any more canvas?"

"No, and it's lucky we can't. We'd topple over with an inch more of rag. Ease up a trifle on the helm. She's staggering too heavily."

On through the heaving waters the White Wing dashed. But her maneuver was seen through by the oystermen, for several of the forward boats tacked and stood back, so that, before she came up with the two laggards in the rear, they were reinforced by a half-dozen other boats.

The White Wing, however, dashed bravely

forward, heedless of the odds, and the belligerent show of the law-breakers.

"Surrender, you rascally pirates!" yelled the captain, in a ringing voice. "We are officers of the law, and it will be a sorry day for you if you attempt any resistance."

A short, sturdy, bronzed figure sprung into the ratlines of one of the boats, and screamed defiantly back:

"You'd best draw off, ye bloody hounds, while yer skin's whole. There's none of us goin' to be took, and we'll make Rome lively fur ye if ye don't skeedaddle instanter."

"Ready there, boys. Run out that ten-pounder. Give the fools a settler," cried the officer, alluding to an imaginary piece of artillery.

"Fire and be fizzled!" screamed old Dirk, not a bit frightened. "Ready, lads, with your artillery. We'll give and take, if that's the game."

In a few minutes more the police-boat darted into the midst of the pirate fleet. They were all now on the southward course. For a short space she moved side by side with one of the swiftest of the fugitive sloops. Then, with a quick movement of the helm, she fell off slightly, and headed at an angle for the sloop. The next minute the two vessels grazed side by side, and a grapnel was thrown skillfully over the bulwark of the oyster-boat.

"Boarders, away!" cried the stern voice of Mr. West. "Jump, my hearties! Drive the rascals below, or fling them overboard! Away!"

"Ready, lads!" came old Dirk's rasping voice, for it was the Lively Emma which had been grappled. "Give them a volley. We'll teach these bloody Baltimoreans a thing or two. Ready! Aim! Fire!"

There was a hasty ducking of heads on board the White Wing at this command. They expected nothing else than a shower of bullets. But instead, to their utter surprise, came a storm of oysters, rattling on mast and deck. They were almost as bad as bullets. The jagged edges of the shells cut deep gashes, and more than one ugly wound came from that first fierce volley.

Those who were attempting to board in response to their leader's appeal were met full in their faces by another shower of these dangerous missiles, and retreated in dismay.

Some shots were fired by the angry police, but the oysters came with a fury there was no notwithstanding. There seemed to be twenty able fellows on board the Emma. Her crew had been reinforced from the other boats, and at their feet lay a heap of the dangerous missiles, which they flung with vigorous zeal.

It was probably the first time in the history of naval warfare that oysters had been used for ammunition, and it proved the more effective from its novelty. The boarding party retreated in dismay, firing some ineffective pistol-shots, while a number of the crew ran below, with bleeding hands and faces.

At this moment came another sharp volley from the opposite direction. A second of the oyster-boats had forged up on the other side of the White Wing, and came into the battle, with a fierce shower of sharp-edged bivalves.

This was too much. Most of those on the deck of the White Wing ran hastily below, while the bolder few crouched in dread of the flying missiles.

"Tumble aboard, my hearties!" roared old Dirk. "Capture the beggar! We'll larn 'em a thing or two. Slip the hatches; and knock blazes out of these chaps if they stir."

In an instant a throng of stalwart oystermen had boarded the White Wing, and were fastening the crew below, while the few who remained on deck were held prisoners, each by two strong fellows, who threatened to scarify their faces with oyster-shells if they moved a muscle.

"Cut the lines! Let her sails down with a run!" yelled old Dirk. "Cut and slash! Don't leave 'em a whole yard or brace to bless themselves with! Cut and slash, my lovelies!"

Down with a run came the two broad sails. The old fellow sprung fiercely to the mainsail, armed with a long, keen knife, and made long slashing blows through the canvas until the sail was a pitiable sight. He ripped at it with the fury of a madman, yelling:

"Bet that sail don't hold no more wind! Let 'em thank their stars we don't cut their shrouds and chop down their masts. That'll do, my hearties! Aboard again and cast off! Calkerate the policer won't foller us no further to day. Lively! Aboard—and three cheers for the bold oystermen!"

Aboard they rolled. In a moment more the

grappling-irons were cast off, and the Lively Emma forged ahead, leaving the White Wing almost a wreck upon the waters, with a dozen of her lines severed and her mainsail ripped into ribbons.

With cheers and shouts of laughter the oystermen glided away, leaving their discomfited foes mad with chagrin.

CHAPTER X.

A LUXURIOUS PRISON.

THE White Wing lay helpless as a log on the water, while the fleet of her foes sailed merrily away. Her foresail and jib were yet sound, but there needed some reeving and splicing of ropes ere they could be hoisted, while the mainsail had been utterly ruined.

Will West, the officer, raved and stormed with rage, swearing by all that was black and blue that he would yet have the best of the piratical oystermen.

"It's only to turn back and refit, boys. And, by Heaven, I'll have artillery next time, and sink every rascal of them that refuses to surrender."

Bart rolled his fat sides with laughter, as he listened to the furious officer.

"We have met the enemy, and they aren't ours," he declared. "Hang me, if I don't admire that old rogue! It was a confoundedly neat operation, you must give in."

"I'll show them a neater," roared the officer.

"If they don't pay for a new mainsail for the White Wing, then vote me a donkey. Make sail, Cap, as soon as you can, and put about. We'll have to work back to Baltimore for more canvas."

"And meanwhile these chaps will load up and skedaddle," suggested Bart.

"Guess not," answered the captain, dryly. "We happen to have some spare canvas on board. We've only to put into some quiet harbor and we can have all sail set again before two days."

"That's clever. Get under way as soon as possible. We'll have the laugh on these chaps yet."

"How about Frank Frazer?" asked Bart.

"We'll pick him up on our way north. Where is that yacht?"

"Running off under full sail," answered the captain. "Yonder she goes. Hang it all, there's something queer about her movements."

"Where's the other yacht?"

"Off here to the left, under the Maryland shore. She's pulling off north, too. It takes my time what they are after."

"Good or bad, we've got to rescue Frank Frazer!" exclaimed Bart, with energy. "There's some more deviltry at work."

The crew of the White Wing was, meanwhile, busy at splicing the parted lines and preparing to make sail.

But we must return to the fortunes of Frank Frazer, prisoner on board the Comet. His sensations on hearing the door of the cabin locked upon him would be hard to describe. A prisoner in the hands of one whom he now knew to be his deadly enemy, with no one else aboard but that crew of savage-faced negroes, and destitute of a weapon with which to defend himself, the situation was anything but an agreeable one.

There was hope, of course, that the White Wing would return and take him off. But there was also the danger that she would continue her pursuit of the pirates, thinking him in safe hands.

"It's a ticklish predicament," said Frank, with a shrug of the shoulders, "and I'd give a gold repeater to be safe out of this. But I've pulled through worse holes, so I'll keep a stiff upper lip. The first thing is to get dry. If there's anything else in the wind, it can wait."

The warm fire was very agreeable in his soaked condition, and he removed part of his clothes for the better convenience of drying. While thus engaged he waited patiently for what might turn up.

An hour passed. It was very evident that the White Wing had continued the pursuit. And now from above there came the sound of trampling feet and creaking spars. There was a change in the sound of the swashing water. He looked curiously through the thick glass of the cabin windows. At a considerable distance appeared the grassy beach of a low shore. It seemed sweeping rapidly northward, a sure proof that the vessel herself was wearing.

"She is heading up the bay," he doubtfully told himself. "What does this mean? Is she going to run away? Ha! there's that other yacht."

He had just caught a glimpse of the smaller

yacht lying close in to the shore. It was but a momentary glance, for the swinging vessel soon swept her from view, and quickly nothing but the tossing water was to be seen.

Frank returned to the stove, and quietly resumed his drying process.

"Time will tell what's afoot," he remarked. "And I'll have to wait till it's ready to tell."

It seemed, indeed, as if time was likely to be in no hurry with its tale. Several hours passed away, and yet Frank was left alone, while he could tell from the movement of the vessel that they were still bound north. His clothes had become thoroughly dried, and with his ordinary easy temperament, he looked around him for some pastime.

In an open locker at his left lay some books and a bunch of cigars. He examined the former, and found that they were light novels.

"Good!" he remarked. "I don't want anything heavy just now. And if the captain of this craft don't object, I'll treat myself to one of his cigars."

An hour more passed away. Then there came a click in the lock of the cabin door. It opened, and revealed the form of the commander of the Comet, Frank's mortal foe.

But if the latter thought to surprise his prisoner he was mistaken. The surprise was all on the other side. There sat Frank in an easy-chair, a cigar between his lips, from which wreaths of smoke were ascending, and an open novel in his hand. He nodded easily to his visitor.

"Glad to see you. Trying to while away the time, you see. Take a seat."

"You seem to be taking it decidedly cool," remarked the other, grimly.

"Always do," answered Frank. "And now, my dear sir, if you have no objections, perhaps you will tell me what that blacky meant by turning the key on me. I could dry as well with an open door as a locked one. I am not very anxious to stay aboard your boat, but you needn't fear my jumping overboard to leave it. I've had enough of that for one day."

"I have a little business with you," answered his captor, seating himself with a frowning brow. "As you have the name of being a slippery customer, I prefer to make sure of you."

"Can't your business wait?" asked Frank. "I've just got to a very interesting chapter. It is a question whether the hero of this book will be married or be hung, and I hate to leave him in such a ticklish predicament."

"You are disposed to be very witty, Mr. Frazer," answered the captain, in harsh tones. "Perhaps you are not aware that you are in a worse predicament than the hero of that book. There's no question about what's likely to happen to you. Do you know who I am?"

"I have not had the pleasure of an introduction," rejoined Frank.

"I will tell you, then." He laid his hand on the table. It was a large, white hand, with the glitter of a diamond on one finger. Frank slightly shuddered. Was that the hand that had struck at his life on the day of the horse-race?

"Have you forgotten that, a year ago, you bounded an old man to his death?" asked the visitor, sternly. "Do you remember that glen in the Shenandoah valley, where the old bank cashier was murdered by your arts?"

"I remember pursuing a criminal who had robbed me of my fortune," answered Frank. "I had nothing to do with his death, and I only acted as the agent of justice in his pursuit."

"That excuse will not serve you," was the harsh answer. "I am the son of that old man's only sister. His fate caused my mother's death."

"I am sorry to hear that," rejoined Frank. "Though I do not see that I have any personal concern in it."

"I see it, then," was the bitter reply. "I am of a race that never forgive an injury. You may have heard of the Manleys, and their revengeful spirit. I am Miles Manley."

"Very happy to know you," returned Frank, with a polite nod.

"You will perhaps be less happy when you know me better," was the grim answer. "I swore revenge, and by all that's good I will have revenge. You have escaped me several times, but you are in my power now. You will not escape again."

"Ab! then it is as I suspected," remarked Frank coolly, taking the cigar from his mouth. "I have you to thank, for several delicate attentions, such as a pistol-shot in Baltimore street, a knife-thrust on the race-course, and another bit of knife practice in my bedroom at the Ducker's Rest?"

"It was my hand did it all," answered Manley. "I have no objection to tell you, as I

hardly think you will have the opportunity to inform on me."

"Who knows?" was Frank's easy reply. "I have escaped you three times already. Or four, if we are to count that time you took me for a canvas-back duck."

A smile passed over his face as his foe involuntarily clapped his hand to his back. The effects of Bart's shot seemed to trouble him there yet.

"Some fool stood in my way on all those occasions," answered the cold-blooded villain. "I hardly think it will happen again. That woman who warned you before is in safe hands now. You have no weapon. What will you do?"

"Perhaps I may find some fool of the same kind here. Among those negroes, for example."

"Ha! that's your hope, eh? Well, you shall have the chance," with a grim laugh. "I am going to kill you, Frank Frazer, understand that. You can go among the negroes and tell them that. You are at full liberty. Here is the way open to you;" he flung open the door. "I wish to see if you can win them over."

"Very well," answered Frank, dropping his book, and rising to his feet. "You don't object to my helping myself to another cigar? They are not bad specimens of the weed."

Manley only stared, as his would-be victim quietly helped himself. This coolness was a little beyond anything he had ever met.

With no further attention to him Frank walked on deck. His first movement was to take a survey of the situation. They were well out on the waters of the bay, the western shore lying far off to their left. Miles away to the south he could faintly distinguish a sail, too far off for him to make out that it was the disabled White Wing, slowly creeping north. Much closer at hand was the smaller yacht, which had persistently dogged the Comet throughout the entire day.

It was now not a quarter of a mile off, on the larboard quarter of the Comet, on which vessel it seemed gaining. The sharp wind of the morning had fallen, and the breeze now blew light and fitfully.

A gleam of hope shot into Frank's eyes as he saw the proximity of this vessel, the more so as he noticed Manley's frowning observation of it. Evidently it was not in league with him.

"What does that fellow want?" he asked himself, surlily. "He has been dogging me all day."

"I can try my luck with these chaps?" asked Frank.

"Yes," rejoined his fierce foe. "And I'll settle the one that you win over."

He drew a pistol from his pocket as he spoke. Frank looked again over the water. The small yacht was still gaining.

The released prisoner walked slowly aft, closely observing the faces of the crew as he passed. They were an evil-faced set, with lowering brows and savage expression, and had been evidently chosen for a purpose.

"Well, what do you think of them?" asked Manley, with grim satisfaction.

"There is another yet. The man at the wheel."

Manley laughed disdainfully.

"You are welcome to try him."

Frank walked aft, gazing keenly around him as he did so. His situation was indeed a perilous one. He seemed as much a prisoner on deck as when locked within the cabin, with the waters of the bay around him, and those fierce black faces watching his every movement. And behind, like an executioner, stood the villainous commander, pistol in hand, and a smile of devilish malignity on his lips.

The only shadow of hope lay in that vessel stealing slowly up on their lee. It was now nearly within hail, and he felt for a moment inclined to call for aid.

But another thought came to him as he gained the after deck, and took in at a glance the situation of affairs. The helmsman was a stalwart black, the fiercest and most determined-looking of the crew. Appeal for aid to such a fellow would evidently be useless. But Frank had no idea of demanding aid; he had bolder thoughts in his mind.

He laid his hand on the wheel.

"Let go," he said. "I will take the wheel."

"Why?" demanded the helmsman, in surprise.

"It is your duty to obey, not to question. This is my reason why."

A quick movement; a rapid shooting out of Frank's muscular arm; and the astonished negro received a blow on the neck that would almost have felled an ox. Down he went, prostrate to the deck.

In an instant Frank had seized the wheel, swung it rapidly around, and lashed it fast. The Comet suddenly came up into the wind, with quivering sails.

"What in the fiend's name do you mean?" yelled Manley, starting aft.

"Only that you were a fool not to keep your bird caged, when you had him," cried Frank in reply, as he hurled an iron missile at the head of his enemy.

Manley dodged, and at the same moment fired an ineffectual shot. Ere he could repeat it Frank had placed a foot on the taffrail, flung his cap in the air as a signal to the coming yacht, and given a quick leap. With a loud splash he struck the water in the wake of the Comet, whose sails were yet uselessly shivering in the wind.

CHAPTER XI.

A STERN CHASE.

FRANK's hasty movement had not been an ill-advised one. He had in his quick observation noticed two things. First that the stranger yacht was no consort of the Comet; and second, that she was the best sailor, with the light wind then prevailing. She was coming up rapidly, and there was a chance of his being picked up ere the Comet could be got before the wind again.

He swam as far as he could under water before coming to the surface, fearful of a second shot from the pistol of his foe. And his fear was well founded, for he no sooner appeared than Manley dived at him. But Frank had instantly fired again, and the bullet uselessly struck the water where he had just been, and skipped into the air again, failing to penetrate the surface.

With an oath the discomfited villain flung his pistol to the deck, and grasped the wheel. The felled helmsman was just slowly rising, with a dazed look in his eyes. He had got a settler from the hardest hitter in Baltimore.

Frank again came to the surface, a hundred yards away. He looked keenly around. The stranger yacht had continued its rapid course, until he was now midway between the two vessels. The Comet was slowly falling off before the wind, and her sails beginning to fill. From the deck of the stranger faces could be seen, looking eagerly toward him. The firing on board the Comet had evidently attracted their attention.

"A rope, good friends!" cried Frank. "Stand by to take a passenger on board."

No admonition was needed. The yacht slightly yawed, and came up so as to bring him close under her lee. As she did so, a half-dozen ropes were flung over the side, and one eager fellow lowered himself to the water's edge with outstretched hands. As the vessel glided swiftly by, within a few feet of the swimmer, this daring fellow grasped him by the collar. In an instant Frank was being towed alongside.

"Haul away there," yelled the captor. "I've got our prize."

Willing hands were lent to the work, and in less than a minute both men were seized and fisted on deck, the stalwart captor still clinging to the collar of his prize.

Frank shook the dripping water from his clothes and looked curiously around.

The boat was considerably smaller than the Comet, but remarkably neat and trim. There were four persons on deck, three of whom apparently formed the crew, while the fourth, who was looking with strange interest at Frank, at once attracted his attention.

He knew him at a glance, and a cry of surprise came from his lips as he recognized the cadet-like youth of the Ducker's Rest, the brown-faced, mustached young man whose strange movements had caused so much surprise.

"You here?" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

The youth smiled, and turned to the man who had rescued Frank, a sturdy, determined-looking personage.

"Let her head fall off a few points, Captain Mather. The Comet is rounding up after us, and we want our best sailing course."

"Are you going to run away?" asked the man addressed, in a tone of remonstrance that was almost sneering.

"Yes," came the quiet but firm answer. "They are too strong for us; and I am not eager for a fight. I would sooner show them the heels of the little Pride."

Frank was attracted as he had been before, by the softness and sweetness of the speaker's voice.

"Do not go out of your course on my account," he protested. "They mean me no good, but—"

"I know, I know," hastily interrupted the youth. "And I understand the temper of the commander of that craft and his savage crew. We dare not face them. They have the wind again and are in chase of us, Captain Mather. What do you think of the chances?"

"We can beat them hollow, unless the wind freshens too much."

"But Mr. Frazer is shivering in his wet clothes. Take him below, sir, and give him something dry to wear. You have had ill-fortune to-day."

"Why, two cold baths in one day are rather more than is desirable," answered Frank with a shrug, as he followed the captain below.

In ten minutes, he came again on deck attired in a suit of rough but warm sailor clothes, which fitted him as if cut for his form. He looked doubly handsome in this attire, and felt a sensation of pride as he noticed a look of admiration in the eyes of the youthful yachtsman.

Frank took a quick glance over the waters. The Comet was coming up behind them with all sail set, at something more than a quarter-mile distant.

He could see the form of his foe, erect on the heel of the bowsprit, gazing intently toward the chase. But the Pride was easily holding her own, and had, indeed, gained slightly since he went below. She was before the wind, running directly across the bay.

"It is our best course for speed," said the young man, noticing Frank's inquiring look.

"I don't like the idea of running away," answered Frank, "and hope you will not go out of your course on my account, Mr.—Excuse me, for asking your name."

"Bradley," answered the youth, with a slight hesitation, while a shade of color came to his cheek. "As for my course, I have none special. I am only out pleasureing, and north, south, east or west are all one to me. Is not the wind changing, captain?"

"Yes, sir; it seems veering round to the northward."

"We had better meet it, then."

"Ay, ay."

The wind, in fact, had suddenly shifted, and after a few hesitating flings and lulls, came out decidedly from the north.

The yacht's head was at once put south, and she ran down the bay with a free sail. This maneuver increased her distance from the Comet, which lay to the northwest.

"We've a good half mile the start!" exclaimed Captain Mather with satisfaction, "and no danger of running into the Delaware shoals. If the wind holds at this, we can laugh at them. If it strengthens, as it promises to do, the laugh may be on the other side."

"I don't believe there's a yacht in Baltimore can overhaul the Pride on a wind!" exclaimed Mr. Bradley, earnestly. "We are dropping the Comet every minute."

The captain smiled at the young man's enthusiasm, as he turned away.

It was a bright, beautiful day. The afternoon sun shone warmly on the waters, and threw an agreeable temperature on the deck of the yacht. Mr. Bradley drew up a brace of camp-stools, and invited his guest to be seated. The water gurgled and swirled beneath the swift boat, as it darted onward with the speed of an eagle, its sail swelling and its tall mast bowing before the strengthening wind.

Behind, at a considerable distance came the Comet, with every stitch of sail set, rushing onward like a great, white-winged bird. Frank looked intently ahead. No trace of the police boat was to be seen. But in the far distance to the southward the glint of sails could be faintly distinguished. He recognized it as the oyster fleet.

"Where is the White Wing?" he asked himself. "I saw her a half-hour ago."

"I fancy she has put ashore," answered Mr. Bradley. "She had a fight with the oystermen, and drew off as if she had got the worst of it. She may have gone in somewhere for repairs."

Frank looked at his companion with an interest he felt every time he heard that voice, with its amazingly familiar strains.

"Where have I met you before?" he asked.

"At the Ducker's Rest."

"But where before that?"

"Nowhere, I fancy. Have you ever been to Annapolis?"

"Ha! Then you are in the Naval Academy?"

"I did not say so," came the laughing reply. "Suppose I ask you a few questions, Mr. Frazer? I happen to know the commander of yonder yacht, and the kind of man he is; and I had a

purpose in keeping so close to him. But I would like now to hear your story. Why were you shot at, and forced to leap overboard? It was fortunate that the Pride was so close at hand."

"Fortunate indeed," answered Frank.

He proceeded to tell the story of his adventures on board the Comet. He had a deeply interested auditor, for the young man beside him seemed to hang eagerly upon every word, while his face flushed and paled at the crises of the narrative. His questions brought out the remainder of Frank's story, the various attempts which had been made upon his life, his protection by a vailed woman, and finally the murderous assault and remarkable escape at the Ducker's Rest.

The denouement of this story seemed to greatly excite the young man. He laid both hands on Frank's arm, and looked up in his face with an interest that hung on every word. He breathed heavily, his face grew pale, a shudder ran through his frame as the perilous crisis of the narrative was told. Frank looked around in surprise at this strange excitement of his auditor.

The young man sprung to his feet with a forced laugh, though he could not drive the pallor from his cheeks and lips.

"I was always nervous," he exclaimed, "and your story has wonderfully excited me. You should not have such thrilling adventures. How now, captain, is not the wind freshening?"

"Yes," answered the captain briefly. "And it is going to blow sharply before many minutes. The Comet is our full match with this wind. We are not dropping her now an inch in a mile."

"But a stern chase is a long one," answered the youth.

"Very true. And here's the oyster fleet looming up to the south. If there's nothing better off, we can run among them, and laugh at the Comet."

The oystermen, yet several miles in advance, seemed to be again at work dredging. A half-mile in the rear the Comet came crowding on. The wind constantly freshened, and the tall mast of the Pride bowed perilously.

"Can we carry all this sail, captain?" Mr. Bradley anxiously asked.

"We will not take in a stitch till the Comet does," he decidedly answered. "She is more than our match with this breeze, and we will not give her the advantage of extra sail."

"But if a spar goes?"

"When we can run no longer we will fight," answered the captain energetically, as he turned again to his duty.

CHAPTER XII.

A BULLET IN THE RIGHT SPOT.

WITHIN ten minutes the wind had greatly freshened. Both vessels were running under a press of sail, but it was very evident that the Pride was no match for the Comet with this wind. Captain Mather kept all his sail spread, though his boat was fearfully crowded, but he had made up his mind to sink ere he would take in a stitch until the Comet showed him the example.

"I'll bet the Pride against her any day," he proudly declared. "She may not outsail her in a hurricane, but she'll outswim her. Not a reef knot will I tie till I see him shortening."

"There's a fearful strain on the sail," said Mr. Bradley, a little pale. "Sail or mast will go, if we keep on."

"Let them go," answered the captain, briefly. "If the wind shortens sail for us, there's no hindering it."

Frank looked a little scornfully at the young man. He was more of the bold temper of the captain, and disdained these evidences of weakness. Yet there was something about that soft, pale face that attracted him despite himself. He could not help feeling a deep interest in it. There was something indeed strange—some mystery about it which he could not make out. The smile of disdain vanished from his face, and a look of absorbing attention replaced it.

Meanwhile the chase went on. The waters boiled under the sharp prow of the Pride, and ran off in glistening lines behind her. Her broad sail bellied in the wind till the mast bent like a whip-lash with every successive puff. Should a stay give way, the whole thing would go by the board. But the cordage stanchly held, as the light boat shot onward with arrowy speed.

Behind came the Comet, staggering under her crowd of sail, and rushing with immense rapidity through the water. She had been gaining now for half an hour, and was little more than a quarter of a mile in the rear. In ad-

vance, some two miles distant, lay the oyster-fleet, under shortened sail, and seemingly at work in the business of dredging, with little heed to the two vessels that were coming rapidly upon them.

It was a question whether the Pride could reach them before being overhauled by her pursuer.

Still the chase continued, now the Comet gaining rapidly. A mile was quickly passed—a mile and a half; the pursuer was scarcely a hundred yards in the rear. The heavier yacht came on like a fate, with a steady and implacable energy. She was steering directly for the stern of the Pride.

"What does she mean?" asked Mr. Bradley, in a tone of alarm. "Does she intend to run us down?"

"It looks like it," answered the captain, grimly.

"Had we not better change our course?"

"We must keep dead before the wind, or we will go to the bottom," was the stern reply. "But, by the Lord! I'll hurt some of them before they hurt us."

He walked below. In a minute he returned, with a rifle in his hand, and a look of fierce determination on his face.

Frank meanwhile stood at the taffrail, gazing aft. The Comet seemed perilously near, and was coming on with the grim energy of an avenging demon. On her prow stood erect the form of his mortal foe, with a malignant smile on his face. His intention was becoming more and more evident. He was bent on running down the Pride and sinking her with all on board.

Frank felt a trembling hand on his arm. He looked around into the face of the young yacht-owner. Its pallor had deepened, and there was a nervous twitching of the lips that indicated some deep emotion. Frank placed his arm around the waist of the youth, with as much tenderness as if it had been a woman.

"Do not fear," he gently remarked. "We will escape him yet."

The youth released himself from the half-embrace, while a flush replaced the pallor of his face.

"He is a fiend," he declared. "It is not for myself I fear. But, why does he chase you with such implacable hatred?"

"It is the blood vendetta that I have told you of," answered Frank. "I do not like to kill a man; but, by Heaven, if he pursues me much further—"

"No, no!" exclaimed his companion in sudden excitement. "Not that! You must not kill him! Promise me you will not!"

"Why are you so interested in him?" asked Frank, looking curiously into the trembling face.

"No matter. Promise me—Ah! Do not fire!" He darted quickly aside, to Captain Mather, who had the rifle to his eye, and was taking a cool aim at their malignant enemy.

In an instant the muzzle of the weapon was thrown up, and the bullet whistled harmlessly through the rigging of the approaching yacht. Its villainous commander stepped quickly down from his exposed position.

"Why did you do that?" cried Captain Mather fiercely. "Why did you do it, I say? It's come to be life for life now, and my life is as good as his!"

"This is my vessel!" answered the youth haughtily. "While I am on board of it I will command!"

"Not when my life is in question," screamed the captain in reply. "Look yonder. She is not a hundred feet from us. She will crash into our stern in ten minutes more, at this speed."

"Let me have the rifle," said Frank, as a thought came to him. "Have you another cartridge?"

"Yes," answered the captain, as he reloaded the weapon.

"What are you going to do?" asked the youth, with a nervous tremor in his voice.

"I would do nothing wrong if I should send a bullet through the brain of that hound, who means death to us all," was Frank's stern answer. "But I do not want his blood on my soul. See the craven! He is dodging. He knows Frank Frazer's reputation with the rifle."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to shorten sail for them."

He pointed upward to the slender line that held the great sail of the Comet aloft. Captain Mather laughed incredulously.

"Do you mean that you will cut that rope with a rifle bullet?" he asked. "The man never breathed that can do it."

"If I had solid footing I would soon show you that," answered Frank. "I cannot be sure from this uneasy deck."

He waited a few minutes more, while all on board anxiously watched him. They were now close upon the oyster fleet, the crews of which were watching the chase with intense interest.

The Comet was now so close that the extremity of her jib-boom nearly overlapped the stern of the Pride. Five minutes more and the crash would come. Not a soul was visible on her deck. The rifle in the hands of the redoubtable marksman had driven them all from sight.

The weapon came to Frank's shoulder, pointed aloft at a line so slender that it looked like a spider's web at that distance. He stood with the steadiness of a rock, as his eye glanced along the sights. But he did not fire. It would not do to miss now, and the footing was too insecure.

He lowered the rifle, while the hearts of all on board throbbed with intense anxiety. The extremity of the jib-boom lapped the stern of the Pride. He continued to wait, without a movement of his muscular frame, or a change in his set look, until the puff of wind blew itself out, and the breeze lowered to its steady rate.

"Now for it!" he cried, bringing the rifle again with a quick motion to his shoulder.

For hardly a second he stood there, his keen eye glancing along the sights. Then a flash of fire shot from the mouth of the weapon, and a sharp report broke on the air.

All eyes were directed upward to the taut line at which he had fired, and a look of bitter disappointment came into their faces as they saw that the line still held.

"By all that's unlucky, you've missed!" yelled the captain. "Here. Let me ram in another cartridge. You've time to try it again."

Frank laid his hand on the young man who stood beside him, gazing with pallid earnestness into his face.

"Wait an instant," he said, "till the next puff."

A fierce blast of air came as he spoke. The sail of the Comet swelled and strained. At the same instant there came a sharp crack aloft, and the line was seen to part, its two ends flying wildly in the air.

"I don't often miss," said Frank coolly.

Down came the heavy gaff, no longer held aloft. The loosened sail swelled out with the wind, and then gave way before the intense strain. With a report as of a cannon shot it parted, rending into shreds, which cracked like whip-lashes in the wind.

The speed of the rushing Comet quickly diminished, while the Pride, whose sail had been robbed of wind by that of her pursuer, shot with new speed ahead. Frank sprung upon the taffrail, rifle in hand, and greeted with a shout of derision his baffled foe.

"Show your cowardly head," he yelled, "and perhaps I can spare a bullet for you."

But the other evidently thought that prudence was the better part of valor, and kept concealed.

Mr. Bradley caught Frank excitedly by the arm, and pulled him back from his exposed situation.

"Do you not see that you are making yourself a mark for a pistol bullet?" he cried, in tones of womanly dread.

The next minute the Pride ran in among the oyster vessels, whose crews greeted Frank's late exploit with three rousing cheers.

"Ahoy, the oysterman!" haled Frank. "We are friends. That hound tried to run us down. Will you stand by the little yacht against the big?"

"Ay! ay!" came in a ringing reply. "And make fish-meat of the bloody rogues if they don't skedaddle."

Down came the straining sail of the Pride. It was caught by strong hands and deftly furled, while the craft gradually lost the great speed at which she had been running. Meanwhile the Comet had veered under her jib, and her crew was seeking to secure the rent and flapping sail. Frank's bullet had completely turned the tables. He had only wounded the rope, but a line with a cut strand is a weak dependence in a gale.

"We'll stick to you through thick and thin!" cried old Dirk, as the Pride glided close by the Lively Emma. "And if you want a good fry of prime 'ysters, come aboard."

"You won't give them to us as you did to the crew of the White Wing?" asked Captain Mather.

"Nary time!" laughed old Dirk. "The shells for our foes, the 'ysters for our friends; that's the 'ysterman's motto. We guy 'em to them in the shell, so's they could open 'em themselves. You can have yours on the half shell."

A laughing rejoinder followed. Frank locked around for the young yachtsman, but he had disappeared.

"Where is Mr. Bradley?" he asked.

"Gone below."

He descended the companion-stairs, but paused in surprise as his eyes took in the scene before him.

For there, rather crouched than sat the young man, his face in his hands, while his whole frame shook as with deep emotion. He seemed to be bitterly sobbing. The intruder gazed at him for a moment in surprise. It seemed like a complete nervous relaxation—a hysterical attack.

Frank turned and softly withdrew. A strange suspicion had come across his mind at that minute. A dozen recollections flashed upon him at once. Whether his fancy had any value time only could tell; but he would not have intruded upon the privacy of that crouching figure just then for the world.

CHAPTER XIII. THE FATE OF THE PRIDE.

MORNING had again dawned on the broad waters of Chesapeake Bay. A night had passed since the events recorded in our last chapter, and the sun was mounting high in the east, pouring his bright beams far over sea and land. Various changes had taken place in the positions of the parties concerned. The oyster fleet was considerably reduced in numbers. Some of its vessels, sufficiently loaded, and fearful of a longer stay in those waters, had decamped during the night, so that the morning rays lit but four boats out of the dozen of the previous day.

There had also been changes in the position of the two yachts. The Pride lay side by side with the Lively Emma, old Dirk's craft. As for the Comet, she had managed to repair her torn canvas during the night, and was now also among the oyster fleet, in close company with the remaining three boats. It appeared as if some understanding existed between Miles Manley and the oystermen.

At a considerable distance to the north another sail appeared. But it was yet lost beneath the shelter of the land, and it was impossible to decide whether or not it was the White Wing.

The high wind of the previous day had lulled, and only a gentle breeze now ruffled the surface of the water. The boats lay under easy sail, gliding gracefully over the liquid element.

Old Dirk stood on the deck of the Pride, an expression of virtuous indignation on his hard but honest face.

"Somehow or t'other I never coddled to rogues and murderers," he declared with great energy. "Now that chap boarded me last night and tried to buy me over—me, Dirk Hardscrabble, that's never done a dirty trick in my life, 'cept you call the piratin' a few 'ysters off the square."

"He tried to bribe you?"

"Jist that. But he wasn't long in diskivering as he was barkin' up the wrong tree. I guv him a private hint to git, and he got."

"What sort of a hint?" asked Frank, laughing.

"Wall, I told him if he didn't absquatulate quicker nor a 'skeeter could wink his right eye, I'd b'ile him like a lobster, and keelhaul him to cool off."

Frank continued to laugh at the old man's idea of a gentle hint.

"I am afraid he has found others more open to bribes," he remarked.

"He's bought over them there hounds, body and soul—if they've got any souls," ejaculated Dirk. "I'm afear'd we're goin' to have a bit of a scrimmage. My men's ready for it. But they're two to one, and that's big odds."

"What shall we do, then? Run?"

"Nary run! Not while I've got a peg to stand on. Here they come. I'll git aboard the Lively Emma. If there's fight in the wind, I kinder enjoy a brisk tussle."

The opposite party, consisting of the Comet and her three new consorts, had indeed veered, and were bearing down upon the Pride and the Lively Emma, who remained awaiting them, with no show of fear.

There was a considerable distance between them, and flight was not out of the question, for the wind was in prime order for the little Pride, but no one showed any evidence of dread except the young yachtsman, Mr. Bradley.

He turned slightly pale as he saw the four boats bearing down.

"We are no match for them," he declared. "They are more than two to our one, and it is madness to await them."

"It seems to me that we have done enough running away," rejoined Frank. "I feel like facing them."

"For what? To be killed? For that devil means to kill you! There is no use to act like brainless fools," exclaimed the young man angrily. "Yonder comes a boat which you think to be the White Wing. We had better run up to meet it. If we join forces with it we will be a match for these fellows."

"By Jupiter, there's sense in that!" cried Captain Mather.

"All right," said Frank indifferently. "It is all one to me."

A hail to their consort, a cheerful "Ay! ay!" in reply from old Dirk, and the two boats were gracefully round, heading north.

It was a very doubtful experiment. The as-sailing fleet lay some distance off to the north and east, and might, by sailing close to the wind, intercept the passage of the two fugitives. The breeze came from several points to the north of west, and struck on the larboard quarter of the fleeing consorts, as they pushed north, on the opposite tack to that of their pursuers.

Hand over hand the latter came on, drawing nearer at every moment. There was a critical point which the fugitives must pass for safety, and every breath was suspended as they drew near.

"It's goin' to be nip and tuck," exclaimed old Dirk. "We're huggin' the wind as close as is in wood and canvas. But it'll be a scrape if we pass. I've a thunderin' notion to fall off, and run down one of them beggars."

"A'l's fair in war," yelled Frank in reply. "The Pride might do the same thing, but she's too light."

Five minutes more brought the two parties very close together, the one running north, the other west, and likely to meet at the northeast point. The Price had drawn slightly ahead of her consort. But the Comet was also in advance of the oystermen, and the contest for speed lay between the two yachts.

On they came, steadily. A biscuit could have been thrown from deck to deck. Yet the Pride had slightly the advantage, and seemed likely to sail just clear of her pursuer.

A cry of triumphant disdain came from the lips of Captain Mather. It was too soon, for at this instant the wind unfortunately shifted a point more to the north, and the head of the Pride fell off to the eastward. The result was inevitable. The next instant the bowsprit of the Comet shot over her deck, to be followed by a thundering crash as the heavier vessel struck with her sharp prow square upon the exposed side of the fugitive.

There came a rending and ripping of planks, both vessels trembled through every timber, and as the Comet slowly tacked off, a gaping wound was visible in the side of the smaller yacht, through which the water poured in a swirling torrent.

The poor Pride had got her death-wound. She was already settling in the ruthless waters. The liquid element seethed and boiled as it poured into the gaping aperture. A fierce cath broke from the bearded lips of Captain Mather as he stamped heavily upon the deck.

"If that infernal wind had only held for a minute longer!" he exclaimed. "Luck's dead against us!"

He sprung for the bowsprit of the Comet, in company with his two men. But Frank and the young yachtsman stood together on the deck of the sinking vessel, the former with a gloomy but resolute face, the latter clinging to him as if to a last refuge. The liquid eyes of the young man were bent upon Frank's countenance as if in hope to find safety there.

The vessel quivered and sunk beneath their feet. She was going down! Unless they wished to be taken with her, there was nothing for it but to trust to the water. Wreathing his arm protectingly around the slender waist of his companion, Frank sprung. With a surge they struck the waves.

As they rose to the surface the face of Miles Manley was visible, gazing with bitter malignity over the side of his vessel. It was a perilous position, for Frank saw in an instant that his companion was unable to swim. He battled the waters with his right hand, while he continued to support his helpless comrade with his left.

Evidently it was the object of the fiendish villain to let them helplessly drown, but at that

moment there came a cheering cry from Old Dirk, whose vessel had forged up just in the rear of the Comet.

"Hold your own, my hearty! Paddle lively! I'll have a boat down in a jiffy and pick you up. Merrily away, my lads!"

At this cheery hail Manley turned and spoke to his crew, and with marvelous rapidity a boat was dropped into the water. Two of the black sailors sprung into it, and pushed off with an oar to where Frank was still valiantly struggling for the life of himself and his companion. Seized by the strong arms of the negroes, they were lifted into the boat, just as the boat of the Lively Emma fell with a splash into the water.

At the same instant, with a wild, whirling motion, the Pride went down into the treacherous waves, making a vortex into which rushed the heaving and tossing waters. The boat containing the rescued pair was sucked strongly toward this whirlpool, but was drawn back by the ropes which held it, bow and stern, to the side of the Comet. A creaking of blocks followed, and in a minute more the boat, with its crew, was lifted bodily from the water and landed on the vessel's deck.

The Pride had vanished; only the extremity of her mast standing above the surface of the water.

"We'll take care of your friends," cried Manley, mockingly, to old Dirk. "And if you choose to come aboard, I'll treat you to that keelhauling which you promised me."

"I'll come aboard yet," exclaimed Dirk, significantly. "Be mighty keenful how you deal with them there folks, or I'll make things lively for you, now you bet."

The prow of the Lively Emma fell off as he spoke. She wore round and stood toward the three oyster-boats, whose crews were curiously surveying the exciting incidents we have just detailed.

Perhaps the old fellow thought to shame them for their base alliance, and to win them back to honesty.

Manley turned toward his involuntary guests, and started with surprise as his eyes fell upon their faces. His surprise was not uncalled for. Frank stood upright before him, supporting his slighter companion, but the dash into the water had wrought a remarkable change in the appearance of the latter.

The mustache which had graced the slender upper lip had vanished, and the face was utterly beardless! The hat, too, was gone, and instead of the short locks of a man there appeared a profusion of long curling hair, that reached nearly to the waist. The unbrowned face was white and fair, as if a stain had been washed from it by the water.

An exclamation of astonishment broke from the lips of Captain Mather, who had pushed aft.

"By the Lord, it's a woman!"

Frank, who had evidently before this penetrated the disguise of his fair companion, only clasped the drooping form more firmly to his side, and proudly faced his foe.

The look of surprise on the face of the latter had changed to one of fierce anger.

"So!" he hastily cried. "This is my cousin Mabel, masquerading as a man, and hanging on to that base adventurer! This is the boasted pride of the Manleys!"

The girlish form released itself from Frank's protecting arm, and stood erect before Miles Manley, with a pride and haughtiness equal to his own.

"You sought to keep me prisoner," she cried, "so that you could pursue your base designs undisturbed. I escaped from your jailer. I saved Mr. Frazer once already from your murderous designs. I am here now to save him once more!"

"You are, eh," sneered the villain. "See if you can save him now." He drew and cocked a pistol as he spoke.

With a cry of dread she threw herself before the threatened form, involuntarily acknowledging her love in that impulsive act.

"You shall not! you dare not!" she cried. "If you slay him, it shall be through my form!"

At this instant, Captain Mather knocked the pistol from the villain's hand, crying out:

"By Heaven, there's others can take a hand in this game!"

"Hal!" yelled Manley, mad with rage. "Who commands on this deck? At them, men! Capture and bind the hounds!"

"This way!" cried the doughty captain. "This way, lads! We'll make a fight for it!"

On one side the stalwart negroes advanced,

with savage look. On the other stood the rescued crew of the Pride, collected into a sturdy group. War was in the air.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE ON THE COMET.

"BLAST my eyes if I ever calkerlated that rough Joe Prime and Bill Barley would sell themselves to a bloody cut-throat like that!"

It was old Dirk that spoke, in tones of deep scorn, as he hailed the captains of the other oyster boats.

"There's money in it, Dirk; more nor ther' is in oysters," came the reply. "If a chap kin make a stake, he's a fool to fling the chance over his shoulder."

"You're a nice coon, you are! Why don't you go bank-bu'stin' at once, if money's so much better nor honesty?"

"It's as honest as stealin' oysters," came the surly reply.

"Look here, Joe, how much of that chap's cash are you jinglin' now in your pockets?"

"Nary red."

"And nary red you'll jingle. He's only makin' a cat's paw of you. See if he don't show his heels and let you whistle when he's through with you. Look at him! There he streaks off now."

"By the Lord, it's true!" cried the oysterman, as he saw the Comet tack and stand north.

"You'd best take a fool's advice, and start home with yer cargoes. Yonder comes the chap we fit off yesterday."

"And what are you goin' to do?"

"To hang round and see fair play. I don't fear 'em. There ain't one on 'em kin overhaul the Lively Emma. But they'd run you all down in a jiffy."

The advice of the shrewd old fellow was taken. The three boats turned and steered south, taking his opinion that prudence was the better part of valor. The Emma, having thus cut off the allies of the foe, stood north, in the wake of the Comet.

The latter was, indeed, between two fires, for the sail which had been visible in the north, had come down rapidly during these events, and was now little more than a mile away, crowding down under a press of sail. At its peak flew the bunting of the White Wing.

Meanwhile a sharp contest was taking place on the deck of the Comet. The two hostile parties had eyed each other for several minutes without coming to blows. The vessel had put about, as we have seen, and Frank took advantage of the same opportunity to induce his fair charge to take refuge behind the combatants.

"You would only tie my bands," he said. "Leave it to me. They will not conquer us easily."

There was a dangerous look on his face as he confronted the group of stalwart blacks, who were cautiously advancing to the assault. They had had some experience of Frank Frazer's fist already. Beside him stood his three associates, Captain Mather and the crew of the Pride.

"On them, men!" cried Manley fiercely. "Down with them! Fifty dollars for the first man who floors one of the hounds!"

At this bribe the negroes leaped forward. They were met in full career by their white opponents, and a sharp combat ensued, hard blows being given and taken on both sides.

One of the crew of the Pride went down like a log before the fist of a stalwart black. Captain Mather avenged him by avoiding the blow aimed at him, and closing with his opponent. A surge, a quick trip, and the fellow was flung heavily to the deck.

Two of them came together at Frank, who stood erect and wary. Destitute of pugilistic skill, they ran at him head on, like mad bulls, thinking to beat him down by sheer force. They were never more mistaken. Out shot his right fist, like a battering-ram, taking one of the negroes between the eyes, and lifting him clear from his feet as it buried him prostrate. Out went his left, fetching the other a sharp clip below the belt, and doubling him up like a knife.

One negro was at the wheel, and three of the five others had gone down at the first meet. The two remaining ones rushed forward, catching weapons from the deck. They were afraid to meet their opponents with bare fists. Captain Mather avoided the blow aimed at him, and wisely retreated, looking for some counter weapon.

Frank, on the contrary, caught the wrist of his opponent, and twisted it till he dropped his weapon. Then stooping, he caught the burly

black around the waist, and a fierce tussle ensued.

Miles Manley had kept out of the combat, though his eyes blazed, and his lips were white with rage. The pistol was still in his hand, and he raised it threateningly as he saw his crew falling like autumn leaves before the blows of their opponents.

A fierce oath came from his lips as he saw that Frank's superior skill was gradually overcoming the brute strength of his adversary. A look of murderous malignity came upon the villainous face.

The head of the man he so deeply hated was exposed toward him. In an instant his arm was extended, the pistol aimed with deadly skill, and the trigger touched. For the moment it seemed as if nothing could save Frank Frazer from death!

But at that critical instant the villain was sharply pushed from behind, and his aim disconcerted. The bullet flew wild of its intended victim—yet it was not discharged in vain. For Captain Mather staggered and sunk to the deck, with the loud exclamation:

"By Jupiter! he has peppered me! I am done for!"

The murderous wretch turned fiercely back, to encounter the face of his cousin, with a set, intense look on it.

"It was I, wretch!" she screamed, in high excitement—"it was I that again saved him from your fiendish hand! I have sworn that you shall not harm him!"

"Look to yourself, Mabel!" he exclaimed, catching her arm in a fierce grip. "Look that I harm not you. By the gods, if this goes on—"

"I fear you not, Miles Manley," she interrupted. "You are a coward at heart, and I know it. You dare not face an open foe, and can only strike in the dark."

His eyes glared like those of a wild animal as he pushed her backward, his white teeth fiercely clinched. But her look was as bold as his. There was brave blood in her veins, and the villain was cowed by that stern, intense regard. He dropped her arm with a curse of rage.

Meanwhile the battle went briskly on. Captain Mather lay crouched where he had fallen, while a groan of pain came from his set lips. Of his crew, the first one felled was slowly regaining his feet, while the other—a slight-built man—had yet kept clear of the combat. The felled negroes had regained their feet, all but the first one whom Frank had struck. At this moment, he overcame the resistance of the one with whom he was wrestling. A quick trip struck the fellow's feet from under him, and he fell heavily. But he dragged Frank with him in his fall.

With a sharp wrench Frank sought to tear himself loose from the negro's grasp, but one of the others flung himself upon him, pinioning his limbs. He struggled vigorously, but in vain; his foes were too strong for him. The remaining two men of the Pride's crew were each opposed by a stalwart black, and could not interfere.

"Hold him!" screamed Manley; "don't let him escape you! Here, hold his arms while I tie him!"

He caught up a rope from the deck, and while Frank's arms were drawn strongly behind him by his captor, he twisted it in a dozen turns around his wrists. His feet were secured in like manner, and his captors rose, leaving their bound prisoner prostrate on the deck, breathing heavily from his late exertions, while his set teeth and gleaming eyes showed that his spirit was yet unbroken.

Manley looked down on him with fierce triumph.

"You are safely mine now," he declared. "You will not escape me again."

"Do not be too sure of that."

"Who will you look to for help? I fancy I have the game in my hands."

"Not much, I reckon," came a loud, boarse voice from behind. "He kin look to the jolly ystermen for help."

The villain turned in alarm, to encounter the face of old Dirk. The Lively Emma had forged up during the fight, until her bowsprit overhung the deck of the Comet. The old salt had just sprung to the deck of the latter, and was being quickly followed by his crew.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE VENDETTA.

In fact the tables were being turned in more ways than one. During the combat the yacht had been sailing north under full sail. Northward lay the White Wing, sailing south under

a press of canvas. Thus they were rapidly approaching each other, and five minutes more would bring the police-boat into the fray.

"Hard a-port your helm!" yelled Manley.

"Hard a-port it is," answered old Dirk, as he fetched the helmsman a clip with a stout club, that laid him prostrate.

"Take that wheel, Jack," he cried to one of his crew, "and steer for the boat ahead. If the nigger mixes in, pitch him overboard."

He rushed forward, followed by the remainder of his crew. Only the man at the helm remained on board the Lively Emma.

The reinforcement came none too soon. As we have seen Frank Frazer was helplessly bound, and Captain Mather prostrate with a pistol-shot. The two less vigorous members of the Pride's crew were no match for the savage fellows who now assailed them. They would have been overcome in a minute more but for the opportune arrival of old Dirk and his crew.

"At 'em, lads! Pile in, my hearties! Go fur the devils, black and white!" yelled the old man.

"Your weapons!" screamed Manley to his crew. "Muskets and axes! Shoot and chop down these rascals! Quick! It's life or death now!"

He turned and rapidly fired several pistol-shots at the assailants, but too hastily to be effective. Ere we could continue this exercise a tap on the hand from old Dirk's club sent his pistol whizzing into the bay, and stung his knuckles as if they had been touched by fire.

"Ahoy, lads!" yelled the energetic old leader. "Cut off the niggers! Don't let them git the' weapons!"

The crew of the Emma had not waited for this command, but were already racing forward for the forecastle, to which the negroes had started for their arms. The two men of the Pride followed, and in a moment whites and blacks were again engaged in a fierce hand-to-hand struggle.

During these latter events Mabel had stood by the mast, breathing heavily, while her face burned with intense excitement. The diversion which had just occurred gave her an opportunity. Drawing a pocket-knife, she sprung quickly to where Frank lay bound and drew its keen blade with rapid energy across the ropes. They were severed before his foe could interfere.

"You are free! You have friends on board!" she cried in his ear. "Now is the time to strike for safety."

Frank leaped to his feet, and glared around him with undiminished spirit. There before him stood his mortal foe, with gleaming eyes and teeth, half-crouched like a tiger for the spring. Between them lay stretched the form of Captain Mather, in seeming pain. He turned toward the forecastle, where a hard combat was going on between the whites and the blacks, the latter seemingly getting the worse of it.

Frank's momentary inattention to his foe was nearly a fatal error. The latter, wrought by the fear of failure to a pitch of savage ferocity, suddenly drew a long knife from his dress, and sprung wildly forward. Mabel's scream of alarm caused Frank to turn. But nothing would have saved him from a perhaps fatal stab had not a providential accident intervened.

We have said that Captain Mather, wounded by the pistol-shot of Miles Manley, lay stricken on the deck between the two foes. The villain, intent on his murderous design, did not perceive this obstacle. Leaping fiercely forward, he stumbled against the form of the prostrate man, and was buried violently to the deck.

Frank sprung back, though all danger was passed, for a most unforeseen fate had befallen his foe. The hand holding the knife had become twisted in his fall, turning the handle to the deck and the blade upward. In an instant the full length of the keen weapon was buried in his breast!

A scream of rage and agony, a roll upon the deck, a convulsive movement which drew the blade from the wound, and a gush of blood that sprung from his breast like a fountain, and the limbs of the self-slain man stiffened, while a final groan came from his lips. He had struck himself a deadly blow.

Frank and Mabel drew back in horror, she clinging with the abandonment of dread to his strong form.

"My God!" she cried. "He is dead! slain by his own wicked hand!"

"It is the hand of destiny," answered Frank. "Thank Heaven his blood is not on my head. He has pursued me with such unrelenting fer-

city, that I would have been justified in killing him."

"It is the old blood revenge of the Manleys," she shudderingly replied. "I would not, for the world, have had him die by your hand."

He wreathed his arm around her waist and drew her to his side, realizing all the struggle between love and duty to family bonds which her words implied.

"You are mine, Mabel," he whispered. "My own sweet love. Nothing stands between us now."

The look which she cast upon his face was more than answer to his words.

The struggle between the two crews, which had still continued, was brought to a sudden termination by this disastrous event. Old Dirk had observed the fall of the villain, and yelled out:

"Give in, you bloody blackbirds! Yer master has killed himself! There he lays, as dead as a capstan bar!"

The negroes, cowed by the fatal event, sullenly withdrew, leaving their adversaries masters of the field.

At the same time there came a hail from over the waters.

"Ahoy the yacht! What the blazes has broke loose aboard? Are you all mad?"

It came from the White Wing, which had forged up during these events. Frank sprung into the rigging, and hailed back in reply:

"We have had a battle, but the field is ours. Come aboard."

"Jump, my lively lads, fur the Lively Emma!" cried old Dirk. "I ain't goin' to trust myself into the hands of them police."

As the White Wing forged up on the lee quarter the Emma dropped off astern. In a minute more Will West, Bart and several others were on board, looking with eyes of surprise on the scene that met their gaze.

Some rapid words of explanation, and the tragedy was made clear.

"The vendetta is at an end," said Frank. "His bloody designs have been fatal to himself. It is thus that the hand of Providence defeats the schemes of the wicked."

We need not dwell at length on the after occurrences of our story. Old Dirk put off southward. He was hailed to come back and he would be safe, but the old chap was too cautious.

"Won't trust you," he cried. "If you want the Lively Emma you've got to outsail her. And I'll treat ye to another mess of 'ysters in the shell afore ye take her. So put that in yer pipes and smoke it."

The other vessels returned to Baltimore, with the slain master of the Comet, and the wounded master of the Pride. Fortunately the hurt of the latter proved not serious, and Captain Mather was soon himself again.

Since then several years have passed away, and have brought certain changes to our characters. Frank and Bart are as close friends as ever, but a change has taken place in the condition of the former. He is no longer a bachelor, but boasts that he has the loveliest and lovingest wife in all Baltimore.

And Mabel, no longer masquerading as a naval cadet, but lovely indeed in her proper garb, is as proud of her husband as he can be of her.

The malignity of the Manley family has died out with the death of the one black sheep in the flock, and the "fair unknown" has no longer to defend her husband from deadly assault. She is happy in the knowledge that he is hers, safe at last from all the peril of the Vendetta.

THE END.

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